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PREFACE.

IN the present attempt at a popular History of the Anglo-Saxons, I have endeavoured to avoid the dry, hard, matter-of-fact style of previous historians—to describe its important truths in a more picturesque and familiar manner—to bring out the actors and scenery more boldly before the eye of the reader—to throw more of a poetical spirit into the narrative—and to give it all the fascination of fiction, without altering a single recorded fact. Such a task scarcely presents an obstacle; history itself furnishes the romance-writer with the most dramatic incidents of his work, and they only require to be cast in a somewhat imaginative mould to make them more interesting than fiction. The hard, naked outline is not all that is necessary to represent truth; and it is this very want of a finer finish and a richer style of colouring that has driven so many readers to the Romance School of history, in which they have found only distorted facts and historical caricatures instead of truth.

There are many who argue that the paths which lead to knowledge must of necessity be difficult and rugged. I believe that it is in the power of any author to make them much pleasanter than they are; and that to accomplish this he has only to amuse as well as to instruct, even as an agreeable companion will, by cheerful conversation, seem to shorten and lighten the way, however long and wearisome it may be in itself. Such a companion I have endeavoured to make this volume, and to bring the very scenery before the “mind’s eye” of the reader, whether the events transpired on sea or land, in castle or cathedral, whenever such word-painting adds to the beauty, richness, and interest of our historical descriptions. In a word, instead of pulling down the venerable pile of history only to build it up into romance, I have tried to restore the sharp finish to its time-worn monuments and delicate tracery—to remove the dust and incrustation under which they are buried—and to bring out more boldly and distinctly

PREFACE.

the wild but striking barbarism of the one, and the impressive beauty of the other.

For the historical materials of this volume, I have been mainly indebted to the sterling and valuable work of the late Mr. Sharon Turner, who, during a long life, neglected no opportunity of acquiring information on the subject. I have before, on several occasions, had to acknowledge his kind and liberal assistance in historical inquiries; and now that he is no more, gratify myself by again recording my obligations, and bearing testimony to the value of his labours. Many other works on Anglo-Saxon History, Manners, and Literature have been consulted, but Turner left me very little to glean elsewhere.

London, March, 1856.

T. MILLER.

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1. PORTRAIT OF KING ALFRED	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
2. MAP OF SAXON BRITAIN	1
3. COMBAT BETWEEN ROMANS AND BRITONS	22
4. CARACTACUS CARRIED CAPTIVE TO ROME	33
5. VORTIGERN AND ROWENA	67
6. CONVERSION OF ETHELBERT	99
7. ALFRED DESCRIBING THE DANISH CAMP	180
8. ALFRED RELEASING THE FAMILY OF HASTINGS	188
9. DUNSTAN DRAGGING KING EDWIN FROM ELGIVA	224
10. THE WELSH TRIBUTE OF WOLVES' HEADS	232
11. CANUTE REBUKING HIS COURTIER	262
12. HAROLD SWEARING ON THE RELICS OF THE SAINTS	300
13. DISCOVERY OF THE BODY OF HAROLD	333
14. TRIAL BY ORDEAL	346

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAWN OF HISTORY.

Obscurity of early history—Our ancient monuments a mystery—The Welsh Triads—Language of the first inhabitants of Britain unknown—Wonders of the ancient world p. 5

CHAPTER II.

THE ANCIENT BRITONS.

The Celtic Tribes—Britain known to the Phœnicians and Greeks—The ancient Cymry—Different classes of the early Britons—Their personal appearance—Description of their forest-towns—A British hunter—Interior of an ancient hut—Costume of the old Cymry—Ancient armour and weapons—British war-chariots—The fearful havoc they made in battle p. 12

CHAPTER III.

THE DRUIDS.

Interior of an old British forest—Druidical sacrifice—Their treasures—Their mysterious rites and ceremonies—The power they possessed—Their belief in a future state—Their wild superstitions—An arch-Druid described—Their veneration for the mistletoe—Description of the Druids offering up sacrifice—The gloomy grandeur of their ancient groves—Contrast between the idols of the Druids and the heathen gods of the Romans p. 17

CHAPTER IV

LANDING OF JULIUS CÆSAR.

Cæsar's reasons for invading Britain—Despatches Volusenus from Gaul to reconnoitre the island—Is intimidated by the force he finds arranged along

the cliffs of Dover—Lands near Sandwich—Courage of the Roman Standard-bearer—Combat between the Britons and Romans—Defeat and submission of the Britons—Wreck of the Roman galleys—Perilous position of the invaders—Roman soldiers attacked in a corn-field, rescued by the arrival of their general—Britons attack the Roman encampment, are again defeated, and pursued by the Roman cavalry—Cæsar's hasty departure from Britain—Return of the Romans at spring—Description of their armed galleys—Determination of Cæsar to conquer Britain—Picturesque description of the night march of the Roman legions into Kent—Battle beside a river—Difficulties the Romans encounter in their marches through the ancient British forests—Cæsar's hasty retreat to his encampment—The Roman galleys again wrecked—Cessation of hostilities—Cassivellaunus assumes the command of the Britons—His skill as a general—Obtains an advantage over the Romans with his war-chariots—Attacks the Roman encampment by night and slays the outer guard—Defeats the two cohorts that advance to their rescue, and slays a Roman tribune—Renewal of the battle on the following day—Cæsar compelled to call in the foragers to strengthen his army—Splendid charge of the Roman cavalry—Overthrow and retreat of the Britons—Cæsar marches through Kent and Surrey in pursuit of the British army—Crosses the Thames near Chertsey—Retreat of the British general—Cuts off the supplies of the Romans, and harasses the army with his war-chariots—Stratagems adopted by the Britons—Cassivellaunus betrayed by his countrymen—His fortress attacked in the forest—Contemplates the destruction of the Roman fleet—Attack of the Kentish men on the encampment of the invaders—The Romans again victorious—Cassivellaunus sues for peace—Final departure of Cæsar from Britain p. 30

CHAPTER V.

CARACTACUS, BOADICEA, AND AGRICOLA.

State of Britain after the departure of Cæsar—Landing of Plautius—His skirmishes with the Britons in the marshes beside the Thames—Arrival of the Roman emperor Claudius—Ostorius conquers and disarms the Britons—Rise of Caractacus—British encampment in Wales—Caractacus defeated, betrayed by his step-mother, and carried captive to Rome—Death of the Roman general Ostorius—Retreat of the Druids to the Isle of Anglesey—Suetonius attacks the island—Consternation of the Roman soldiers on landing—Massacre of the Druids, and destruction of their groves and altars—Boadicea, queen of the Iceni, assumes the command of the Britons—Her sufferings—She prepares for battle, attacks the Roman colony of Camaladonum—Her terrible vengeance—Her march into London, and

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CHAPTER VI.

DEPARTURE OF THE ROMANS.

Adrian strengthens and extends the Roman fortifications—Description of these ancient barriers, and the combats that took place before them—Wall erected by the emperor Severus—He marches into Caledonia, reaches the Frith of Moray—Great mortality amongst the Roman legions—Severus dies at York—Picturesque description of the Roman sentinels guarding the ancient fortresses—Attack of the northern barbarians—Peace of Britain under the government of Caracalla—Arrival of the Saxon and Scandinavian pirates—The British Channel protected by the naval commander, Carausius—His assassination at York—Constantine the Great—Theodosius conquers the Saxons—Rebellion of the Roman soldiers; they elect their own general—Alaric, the Goth, overruns the Roman territories—British soldiers sent abroad to strengthen the Roman ranks—Decline of the Roman power in Britain—Ravages of the Picts, Scots, and Saxons—The Britons apply in vain for assistance from Rome—Miserable condition in which they are left on the departure of the Romans—War between the Britons and the remnant of the invaders—Vortigern, king of the Britons—A league with the Saxons p. 50

CHAPTER VII.

BRITAIN AFTER THE ROMAN PERIOD.

Great change produced in Britain by the Romans—Its ancient features contrasted with its appearance after their departure—Picturesque description of Britain—First dawn of Christianity—Progress of the Britons in civilization—Old British fortifications—Change in the costume of the Britons—Decline in their martial deportment—Their ancient mode of burial—Description of early British barrows—Ascendancy of rank p. 56

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANCIENT SAXONS.

Origin of the early Saxons—Description of their habits and arms—Their religion—The halls of Valhalla—Their belief in rewards and punishments after death—Their ancient mythology described—Superstitions of the early Saxons—Their ancient temples and forms of worship—Their picturesque processions—Dreadful punishments inflicted upon those who robbed their temples—Different orders of society—Their divisions of the seasons—Their bravery as pirates, and skill in navigation . . p. 64

CHAPTER IX.

HENGIST, Horsa, Rowena, and Vortigern.

Landing of Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs—Their treaty with Vortigern and the British chiefs—The British king allots them the Isle of Thanet as a residence, on condition that they drive out the Picts and Scots—Success of the Saxons—Arrival of more ships—Landing of the Princess Rowena—Marriage of Vortigern and Rowena—Quarrel between the Britons and Saxons—Description of their first battle by the old Welsh bards—The Britons led on by the sons of Vortigern—Death of Horsa, the Saxon chief—Rowena's revenge—Pretended reconciliation of the Saxons, and description of the feast where the British chiefs were massacred—Terrible death of Vortigern and the fair Rowena p. 72

CHAPTER X.

Ella, Cerdric, and King Arthur.

Arrival of Ella and his three sons—Combat between the Saxons and Britons beside the ancient forest of Andredswold—Defeat of the Britons, and desolate appearance of the old forest town of Andred-Ceaster after the battle—Revengeful feelings of the Britons—Establishment of the Saxon kingdom of Sussex—Landing of Cerdric and his followers—Battle of Chardfrid, and death of the British king Natanleod—Arrival of Cerdric's kinsmen—The Britons again defeated—Arthur, the British king, arms in defence of his country—His adventures described—Numbers of battles in which he fought—Death of king Arthur in the field of Camlan—Discovery of his remains in the abbey of Glastonbury p. 83

CHAPTER XI.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SAXON OCTARCHY

Landing of Erkenwin—The establishment of the kingdom of Wessex—Description of London—Arrival of Ida and his twelve sons—The British chiefs make a bold stand against Ida—Bravery of Urien—Description of the battle of the pleasant valley, by Taliesin, the British bard—Llywarch's elegy on the death of Urien—Beautiful description of the battle of Cattraeth by Aneurin, the Welsh bard—Establishment of the kingdom of Mercia—Description of the divisions of England which formed the Saxon Octarchy—Amalgamation of the British and Saxon population—Retirement of the unconquered remnant of the ancient Cymry into Wales p. 90

CHAPTER XII.

CONVERSION OF ETHELBERT.

Commencement of the civil war amongst the Saxons—Struggle between Ethelbert, king of Kent, and Ceawlin, king of Wessex, for the title of Bretwalda—Description of the slave-market of Rome—Monk Gregory's admiration of the British captives—Gregory becomes pontiff, and despatches Augustin with fifty monks to convert the inhabitants of Britain—Picturesque description of the landing of the Christian missionaries in the Isle of Thanet—Intercession of Bertha—Ethelbert's interview with Augustin and his followers—The missionaries take up their residence in Canterbury—Conversion of Ethelbert—Augustin is made Archbishop, by Pope Gregory—The rich presents sent to Britain by the Pope—Character of the Roman pontiff—His wise policy in not abolishing at once all outward forms of heathen worship—Eadbald ascends the throne of Kent—Marries his stepmother, and is denounced by the priests—He renounces the Christian faith—The monks are driven out of Essex—Eadwald again acknowledges the true faith, and the persecuted priests find shelter in the kingdom of Kent
p. 99

CHAPTER XIII.

EDWIN, KING OF THE DEIRI AND BERNICIA.

Adventures of Edwin, king of the Deiri—His residence in Wales with Cadvan, one of the ancient British kings—Ethelfrith having deprived him of his kingdom, seeks his life—Edwin flies from Wales, and seeks the protection of Redwald, king of East Anglia—Edwin's dream—The queen of East Anglia intercedes in behalf of Edwin—Redwald prepares to wage war with Ethel-

frith—Religion of the king of East Anglia—Description of the battle fought between Redwald and Ethelfrith on the banks of the river Idel—Death of Ethelfrith, and accession of Edwin to the throne of Northumbria—Edwin's marriage with Edilburga, daughter of Ethelbert—Journey of the Saxon princess from Kent to Northumbria—Attempted assassination of Edwin—Paulinus endeavours in vain to convert Edwin to the Christian faith—The king assembles his pagan priests and nobles to discuss the new religion—Speech of Coifi, the heathen priest—Beautiful and poetical address of a Saxon chief to the assembly—Coifi desecrates the temple of Woden—Peaceful state of Northumbria under the reign of Edwin—Death of Edwin at the battle of Hatfield-chase in Yorkshire—Victories of Cadwallan, the British king—Triumph of the Saxons under Oswald, and death of Cadwallan at the battle called Heaven-field p. 111

CHAPTER XIV.

PENDA, THE PAGAN MONARCH OF MERCIA.

Description of the kingdom of Mercia—Character of Penda, the pagan king—Charity of Oswald—Barbarous cruelty of Penda—His desolating march through Northumbria—Attacks the castle of Bamborough—His march into Wessex—His invasion of East Anglia—Sigebert, the monk-king, leads on the East Anglians—Is defeated by Penda, who ravages East Anglia—The pagan king again enters Northumbria—Oswy offers all his treasures to purchase peace—Is treated with contempt by Penda—Oswy prepares for battle—Penda's forces driven into the river—Death of the pagan king—Great changes effected by his death—Courage of Saxburga, the widowed queen of Wessex—Perilous state of the Saxon Octarchy p. 119

CHAPTER XV.

DECLINE OF THE SAXON OCTARCHY.

Alfred, the learned king of Northumbria—His patronage of the celebrated scholar Aldhelm—Ceowulf, the patron of Bede—Mollo, brother of the king of Wessex, burnt alive in Kent—King Ina and his celebrated laws—Strange device of Ina's queen to induce him to resign his crown, and make a pilgrimage to Rome—Mysterious death of Ostrida, queen of the Mercians—Her husband, Ethelred, abandons his crown and becomes a monk after her violent death—Ethelbald ascends the throne of Mercia—Adventures of his early life—His residence with Guthlac, the hermit, in the island of Croyland—First founder of the monastery of Croyland—Ethelbald joins Cuthred, king of Wessex, and obtains a victory over the Welsh—Proclaims war against Cuthred—Description of the battle, and defeat of Ethelbald—

Independence of the kingdom of Wessex—Abdication of Sigebyht, king of Wessex—His death in the forest of Andredswold—Rapid accession and dethronement of the kings of Northumbria—Summary of their brief reigns.

p. 129

CHAPTER XVI.

OFFA, SURNAMED THE TERRIBLE.

Offa ascends the throne of Mercia—Drida's introduction and marriage with the Mercian king—Character of queen Drida and her daughter Edburga—Offa's invasion of Northumbria—He marches into Kent—Is victorious—Defeats the king of Wessex—His victory over the Welsh—Description of Offa's dyke—Offa's friendly correspondence with Charlemagne—Adventures of Egbert—Murder of Cynewulf, at Merton, in Surrey—Brihtric obtains the crown of Wessex, and marries the daughter of Offa—Ethelbert, king of East Anglia, visits the Mercian court—Queen Drida plots his destruction—Description of a Saxon feast—Dreadful death of Ethelbert—Offa's daughter, Alflæda, seeks shelter in the monastery of Croyland—Murder of Queen Drida—Edburga poisons her husband, Brihtric, king of Wessex—She flies to France—Her reception at the court of Charlemagne—She dies a beggar in the streets of Pavia . . . p. 139

CHAPTER XVII.

EGBERT, KING OF ALL THE SAXONS.

Character of Egbert—His watchful policy—Death of Kenwulf, and decline of the kingdom of Mercia—Egbert annexes the kingdom of Kent to Wessex—Compels Wiglaf, king of Mercia, to pay him tribute—He conquers the kingdom of Northumbria, and subjects the whole of the Saxon kingdoms to his sway—Northumbria invaded by the Danes—They sack the abbey of Lindisfarne, and slay the monks—The Danes again land in Dorsetshire—Egbert presides over a council in London, to devise measures to prevent the ravages of the Danes—The remnant of the ancient Britons who have been driven into Wales, form a league with the Danes, and are defeated—Death of Egbert . . . p. 145

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ANCIENT SEA-KINGS.

Origin of the Danish invaders—Habits of the early Vikings—Their warlike education—Picturesque description of their wild life—Their hatred of the Saxons—Description of their ships and warlike weapons—Arrangement of their plans to plunder—Their vows on the golden bracelet—Power of their leader only acknowledged in battle—Their rude festivities . . p. 150

CHAPTER XIX.

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF THE DANES IN NORTHUMBRIA.

Ethelwulph, king of Kent—His unfitness to govern—The brave bishop of Sherbourne—The two characters contrasted—Boldness of the Danes—They occupy the Isle of Thanet—Battle of the field of Oaks—Character of Osberga, mother of Alfred the Great—Ethelwulph visits Rome in company with his son Alfred—The king of Kent marries Judith, daughter of Charles of France—His presents to the Pope—Returns to England with his youthful wife—Rebellion of his son Ethelbald—Death of Ethelwulph—Ethelbald marries his stepmother Judith—She elopes from a monastery with Baldwin, the grand forester—Death of Ethelbald—Brief reign of Ethelbert—Alfred begins to distinguish himself—The celebrated sea-king, Ragnar Lodbrog—His bravery—Builds a large ship—Is wrecked on the coast of Northumbria—Made prisoner by Ella, and dies in a dungeon—His celebrated death-song—The sons of Ragnar Lodbrog prepare to revenge their father's death—England invaded by their mighty fleet—Their march towards Northumbria—Ravage York—Horrible death of Ella, king of Northumbria—The Danes occupy the kingdoms of the Deiri and Bernicia—Nottingham taken by the Danes—Alfred accompanies his brother Ethelred, and the king of Mercia, in their attack upon the Danes—They enter into a treaty with the invaders—Alfred's marriage and attainments at this period p. 159

CHAPTER XX.

RAVAGES OF THE DANES, AND DEATH OF ETHELRED.

Ravages of the Danes in Lincolnshire—Destruction of the monastery of Bardney—Gallant resistance of the Mercians—Battle near Croyland Abbey—Destruction of Croyland Abbey, and murder of the monks—Sidroc, one of the sea-kings, saves a boy from the massacre—The abbey of Peterborough destroyed by the Danes—Description of the country through which the invaders passed—Their march into East Anglia—The Danes enter Wessex—Battle of Ash-tree hill, and victory of the Saxons—Death of Ethelred p. 169

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCESSION AND ABDICATION OF ALFRED THE GREAT.

Miserable state of England when Alfred ascended the throne of Wessex—He is disheartened by the rapid arrival of the Danes—Enters into a treaty with them, and they abandon Essex—The Danes occupy London—Burrhed, king of Mercia, retires to Rome—The Danes now masters of all

England, excepting Wessex—Alfred destroys their ships—Again enters into treaty with them—He encounters them at sea—Treaty at Exeter—His strange conduct at Chippenham—Vindication of the character of Alfred—His conduct during retirement—Alfred the Great in the cowherd's hut—Discovery of his retreat—His skirmishes with the Danes—Odin, the earl of Devonshire, captures the magical banner of Hubba, the sea-king—Alfred and his followers fortify their island retreat—Poverty of the great Saxon king p. 179

CHAPTER XXII.

ALFRED THE GREAT.

Alfred in disguise visits the Danish camp near Westbury in Wiltshire—His interview with Godrun, the sea-king—Alfred musters the Saxon forces at Selwood forest—The arrival of his followers described—His preparation for battle—Description of the combat—Defeat of the Danes—Alfred besieges the Danish encampment—Surrender of Godrun—Policy and generosity of Alfred the Great—Peaceful appearance of England—Landing of Hastings, the famous sea-king—Alfred increases his navy—Character of Hastings, the sea-king, the most skilful of all the Danish invaders—Alfred marches his army between the Danish forces—His masterly generalship—Hastings offers to quit the kingdom—His treachery—Is again conquered by Alfred—The Danes of East Anglia and Northumbria rise up against Alfred—The wife and children of Hastings are taken prisoners by Alfred, and discharged with presents—After many struggles the Danes are at last defeated—Hastings quits England—Death of Alfred the Great . p. 192

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHARACTER OF ALFRED THE GREAT.

His boyhood—Early love of poetry—Self-cultivation—Wisdom displayed in his conduct with the Danes—Difficulties under which he pursued his labour—His patronage of literary men—Method of study—Summary of his works—He reforms the Saxon nobles—Divides his time—Various purposes to which he appropriates his revenue—His invention for marking the hours—Cultivates an acquaintance with foreign countries—His severity in the administration of justice—Establishment of a rigid system of police—His laws—Intellectual character of Alfred the Great . p. 199

CHAPTER XXIV.

EDWARD THE ELDER.

Ethelwold lays claim to the throne of Wessex—Is backed by the Danes, and crowned at York—Battle of Axeholme and defeat of Ethelwold—Edward

ravages Northumbria—The Danes attack Mercia—They enter the Severn—Battle of Wodensfield, and defeat of the Danes—Edward strengthens his frontier with fortresses—Their situation described—Bravery of his sister Ethelfleda—The Danes enter North Wales—Edward again victorious—Submission of the Welsh princes and the Danes of Northumbria—Death of Edward the Elder p. 202

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REIGN OF ATHELSTAN.

Athelstan, the favourite grandchild of Alfred the Great—While but a boy his grandfather invests him with the honours of knighthood—He is educated by Alfred's daughter, Ethelfleda—Athelstan's sister married Sigtryg, a descendant of the famous sea-kings—The Dane repudiates his wife, and renounces his new religion—Athelstan invades his dominions—Death of Sigtryg, and flight of his sons—Preparation for the invasion of England—The force arrayed against Athelstan—Measures adopted by the Saxon king—Preparations for battle—Picturesque description of the battle of Brunansburg—Anglo-Saxon song on Athelstan's victory—High position attained by Athelstan—Otho the Great marries Athelstan's sister—The Saxon monarch forms an alliance with the emperor of Germany and the king of Norway—Harold of Norway suppresses piracy—Sends his son Haco to be educated at the Saxon court—Presents a beautiful ship to Athelstan—Death of Harold, king of Norway—List of the kings who were established on their thrones by Athelstan—His presents to the monasteries—His charity and laws for the relief of the poor—Cruelty to his brother Edwin—Death of Athelstan p. 212

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REIGNS OF EDMUND AND EDRED.

Accession of Edmund the Elder—Anlaf, the Dane, invades Mercia, and defeats the Saxons—Edmund treats with Anlaf, and divides England with the Danes—Perilous state of the Saxon succession prevented by the death of Anlaf—Change in Edmund's character—His brilliant victories—Cruelty to the British princes—Edmund assassinated while celebrating the feast of St. Augustin, by Leof, the robber—Mystery that surrounds the murder of Edmund the Elder—Edred ascends the Saxon throne—Eric, the sea-king—His daring deeds on the ocean—Description of his wild life—Edred invades Northumbria—Eric attacks his own subjects—Edred's victory over the Danes—Scandinavian war-song on the death of Eric—Death of Edred p. 218

CHAPTER XXVII.

EDWIN AND ELGIVA.

Edwin's marriage with Elgiva—Odo, the Danish archbishop—St. Dunstan—His early life—He becomes delirious—His intellectual attainments—His persecution—He falls in love—Is dissuaded from marriage by the bishop, Ælfheag—He is again attacked with sickness—Recovers, and becomes a monk—Lives in a narrow cell—Absurdity of his rumoured interviews with the Evil One—His high connexions—Analysis of his character—Dunstan's rude attack upon King Edwin, after the banquet—Dunstan again driven from court—Remarks on his conduct—Elgiva is cruelly tortured, and savagely murdered by the command of Odo, the archbishop of Canterbury—Dunstan recalled from his banishment—Supposed murder of Edwin p. 227

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REIGN OF EDGAR.

Power of Dunstan—He is made Archbishop of Canterbury—He appoints his own friends counsellors to the young king—His encouragement of the fine arts—Enforces the Benedictine rules upon the monks—Speech of Edgar in favour of Dunstan's reformation in the monasteries—Romantic adventure of Elfrida, daughter of the Earl of Devonshire—Death of Athelwold—Personal courage of Edgar—His love of pomp, and generosity—His encouragement of foreign artificers—His tribute of wolves' heads—England infested with wolves long after the commencement of the Saxon period—Many of the Saxon names derived from the wolf—Death of Edgar—Elfric's sketch of his character—Changes wrought by Edgar p. 233

CHAPTER XXIX.

EDWARD THE MARTYR.

Dunstan still triumphant—Is opposed by the dowager-queen Elfrida—Her attempts to place her son, Ethelred, upon the throne, frustrated by Dunstan—Contest between the monks and the secular clergy—The Benedictine monks driven out of Mercia—The Synod of Winchester—Dunstan's pretended miracle doubted—The council of Calne—William of Malmesbury's description of the assembly—Dunstan's threat—Falling in of that portion of the floor on which Dunstan's opponents stood—Reasons for supposing that the floor was undermined by the command of Dunstan—

Death of his enemies, and triumph of the archbishop—Edward's visit to Corfe Castle—He is stabbed in the back while pledging his stepmother, Elfrida, at the gate—His dreadful death—Character of Elfrida . p. 238

CHAPTER XXX.

ETHELRED THE UNREADY.

Elfrida still opposed by Dunstan—Ethelred crowned by the archbishop of Canterbury—His malediction at the coronation—Dislike of the Saxons to Ethelred—Dunstan's power on the wane—Insurrection of the Danes—The Danish pirates again ravage England—Courageous reply of the Saxon governor of Essex—Single combat between the Saxon governor, and one of the sea-kings—Cowardly conduct of Ethelred—He pays tribute, and makes peace with the Danes—Alfric the Mercian governor, turns traitor, and joins the Danes with his Saxon ships—The Saxon army again commanded by the Danes, and defeated—Olaf, the Norwegian, and Swein, king of Denmark, invade and take formal possession of England—Ethelred again exhausts his exchequer, to purchase peace—Swein's second invasion of England—Cruel massacre of the Danes by the Saxons—Murder of Gunhilda, the sister of Swein, king of Denmark—Swein prepares to revenge the death of his countrymen—Description of his soldiers—Splendour of his ships—His magical banner described—His landing in England—Alfric again betrays the Saxons—Destruction of Norwich—Ethelred once more purchases peace of the Danes—Ælfeg, archbishop of Canterbury, made prisoner by the sea-kings—He refuses to pay a ransom—Is summoned to appear before the sea-kings while they are feasting, and beaten to death by the bones of the oxen the pirates had feasted upon—Ethelred lays an oppressive tax upon the land—He raises a large fleet—Is again betrayed by his commanders—Sixteen counties are given up to the Danes—Ethelred deserted by his subjects—Escapes to the Isle of Wight, and from thence to Normandy—Swein, king of Denmark, becomes the monarch of England—Death of Swein—His son Canute claims the crown—Is opposed by Edmund Ironside—Canute's cruelty to the Saxon hostages—Miserable state of England at this period, as described by a Saxon bishop p. 249

CHAPTER XXXI.

EDMUND, SURNAMED IRONSIDE.

Courageous character of Edmund Ironside—His gallant defence of London—His prowess at the battle of Searston—Obstinacy of the combat which is only terminated by the approach of night—Renewal of the battle in the morning—Narrow escape of Canute, the Dane, from the two-handed sword

of Edmund Ironside—Conduct of the traitor Edric—Retreat of the Danes—Battles fought by Edmund the Saxon—Ulfr, a Danish chief, lost in a wood—Meets with Godwin the cowherd, and is conducted to the Danish camp—Treaty between Canute the Dane and Edmund Ironside—The kingdom divided between the Danes and Saxons—Suspicious circumstances attending the death of Edmund—Despondency of the Saxons
p. 254

CHAPTER XXXII.

CANUTE THE DANE.

Coronation of Canute the Dane—His treaty with the Saxon nobles—He banishes the relations of Ethelred, and the children of Edmund—Fate of Edmund's children—Canute's marriage with Emma, the dowager-queen of the Saxons—Death of the traitor, Edric—Canute visits Denmark—Death of Ulfr, the patron of Godwin the cowherd—Canute invades Norway—Habits of the Norwegian pirates—Canute erects a monument to Ælfeg, the murdered archbishop of Canterbury—Carries off the dead body of the bishop from London—Night scene on the Thames—Kills one of his soldiers—His penance—Establishes the tax of Peter's-pence—Picturesque description of Canute rebuking his courtiers—His theatrical display, and vanity—His pilgrimage to Rome—Canute's letter—His death
p. 264

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REIGNS OF HAROLD HAREFOOT AND HARDICANUTE.

Sketch of Canute's reputed sons—The succession disputed—Rise of earl Godwin—Refusal of the archbishop to crown Harold Harefoot—Harold crowns himself, and bids defiance to the church—Conduct of Emma of Normandy—Her letter to her son Alfred—He lands in England, with a train of Norman followers—His reception by earl Godwin—Massacre of the Normans at Guildford—Death of Alfred, the son of Ethelred—Emma banished from England—Her residence at Bruges—Hardicanute prepares to invade England—Death of Harold Harefoot—Accession of Hardicanute—Disinters the body of Harold—Summons earl Godwin to answer for the death of Alfred—Godwin's defence—Penalty paid by earl Godwin—Character of Hardicanute—His Huscarls—The inhabitants of Worcester refuse to pay the tax, called Dane-geld—They abandon the city—Reckless conduct of Hardicanute—He invites Edward, the son of Ethelred, to England—Hardicanute, the last of the sea-kings, dies drunk at a marriage-feast in Lambeth p. 272

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ACCESSION OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.

Edward established on the throne of England by the power of earl Godwin—Edward marries Editha, the earl's daughter—Description of the Lady Editha, by Ingulphus—Godwin's jealousy of the Norman favourites, who surrounded Edward—Friendless state of Edward the Confessor, when he arrived in England—Changes produced by the arrival of the Normans in the Saxon court—Independence of Godwin and his sons—Emma banished by her son Edward—Threatened invasion of Magnus, king of Norway—The Saxons and Danes alike jealous of the Norman favourites—Eustace, count of Boulogne, visits king Edward—His conduct at Dover—Several of the count's followers are slain—Earl Godwin refuses to punish the inhabitants of Dover for their attack on Count Eustace—The Normans endeavour to overthrow Earl Godwin—He refuses to attend the council at Gloucester—Earl Godwin and his sons have recourse to arms—The Danes refuse to attack the Saxons in king Edwin's quarrel—Banishment of the Saxon earl and his sons—Sufferings of queen Editha p. 282

CHAPTER XXXV.

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.

Description of the English court, after the banishment of Earl Godwin—William, the Norman, surnamed the Bastard, and the Conqueror, arrives in England—William's parentage—Sketch of his father, surnamed Robert the Devil—His pilgrimage to Rome, and death—Bold and daring character of William the Norman—His cruel conduct to the prisoners of Alençon—His delight on visiting England—Circumstances in his favour for obtaining the crown of England—Return, and triumph of Earl Godwin—England again on the verge of a civil war—Departure of the Norman favourites—Sketch of the English court after the return of the Saxon earl—Death of Godwin—Siward the Strong—Rise of Harold, the son of earl Godwin—Imbecility of Edward the Confessor—Harold's victory over the Welsh—Conduct of Tostig, the brother of Harold—Coldness of the church of Rome towards England—struggle of Benedict and Stigand for the pallium—Mediation of Lanfranc—William the Norman becomes a favourite with the Roman pontiff—Suspicious death of Edward, the son of Edmund Ironside—Edward the Confessor suspects the designs of William the Conqueror—Harold, the son of Godwin, obtains permission to visit Normandy p. 296

CHAPTER XXXVI.

EARL HAROLD'S VISIT TO NORMANDY.

Harold shipwrecked upon the coast of France—Is made captive, and carried to the fortress of Beaurain—Is released by the intervention of William of Normandy—Harold's interview with Duke William at Rouen—Affected kindness of the Norman duke—William cautiously unfolds his designs on the crown of England—His proposition to Harold—Offers Harold his daughter, Adeliza, in marriage—Duke William's stratagem—Harold's oath on the relics of the saints—Description of William the Norman's courtship—Character of Matilda of Flanders—Harold's return to England—The English people alarmed by signs and omens—Appearance of a comet in England—Description of the death of Edward the Confessor.

p. 304

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ACCESSION OF HAROLD, THE SON OF GODWIN.

Harold elected king of England by the Saxon witenagemot—Becomes a great favourite with his subjects—Restores the Saxon customs—Conduct of William the Norman on hearing that Harold had ascended the throne of England—Tostig, Harold's brother, forms a league with Harold Hardrada, the last of the sea-kings—Character of Harold Hardrada—His adventures in the east—He prepares to land in England—Tostig awaits his arrival in Northumbria—The duke of Normandy's message to Harold king of the Saxons—Harold's answer—He marries the sister of Morkar of Northumbria—Duke William makes preparations for the invasion of England—Arrival of Harold Hardrada with his Norwegian fleet—Superstitious feeling of the Norwegian soldiers—He joins Tostig, the son of Godwin—They burn Scarborough, and enter the Humber—Harold, by a rapid march, reaches the north—He prevents the surrender of York—Preparation for the battle—Harold surprises the enemy—Description of the combat—Harold offers peace to his brother—The offer rejected—Description of the battle—Deaths of Harold Hardrada and Tostig—Harold's victory.

p. 314

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ENGLAND INVADED BY THE NORMANS.

Preparations in Normandy for the invasion of England—Description of duke William's soldiers—He obtains the sanction of the pope to seize the crown of England. and receives a consecrated banner from Rome—Meeting

of the barons and citizens of Normandy—Policy of William Fitz-Osbern—Measures adopted by the Norman duke—His promises to all who embarked in the expedition—Vows of the Norman knights—Protest of Conan, king of Brittany—Death of Conan—The Norman fleet arrives at Dive—Conduct of duke William while wind-bound in the roadsteads of St. Valery—Consternation amongst his troops—Method pursued by the Norman duke to appease the murmurs of his soldiers—The Norman fleet crosses the Channel, and arrives at Pevensey-bay—Fall of the astrologer—Landing of the Norman soldiers—William's stumbling considered an ill omen—He marches towards Hastings—Alarm of the inhabitants along the coast—Tidings carried to Harold of the landing of the Normans.

p. 325

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

Harold, king of the Saxons, marches from York—Despatches a fleet to intercept the flight of the Normans—Disaffection amongst his troops—He arrives in London—His hasty departure from the metropolis—Cause of Harold's disasters—Description of the Norman and Saxon encampments—William's message to Harold—Occupation of the rival armies the night before the battle—Gurth advises Harold to quit the field—Morning of the battle—The Saxon and Norman leaders—William the Norman's address to his soldiers—Inferiority of the Saxons in numbers—Strong position taken up by Harold—Commencement of the combat—Courage of the Saxons—The Normans driven back from the English intrenchments—Skill of the Norman archers—Cavalry of the invaders driven into a deep ravine—The battle hitherto in favour of the Saxons—Rumour that William the Norman was slain—The effect of his sudden appearance amongst his retreating forces—Unflinching valour of the Saxons—Stratagem adopted by the Norman duke—Its consequence—William again attempts a feigned flight, and the Saxons quit their intrenchments—Dreadful slaughter of the English—Death of Harold, the last Saxon king—Capture of the Saxon banner—Victory of the Normans—Retreat and pursuit of the remnant of the Saxon army—The field of Hastings the morning after the battle—The dead body of Harold discovered by Edith the Swan-necked p. 338

THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

Their religion—Government and laws—Literature of Anglo-Saxons—Architecture, Arts, &c.—Costume, Manners, Customs, and Everyday life, p. 357

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THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND

Under the Anglo-Saxons.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAWN OF HISTORY.

“ This fortress, built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,—
This earth of majesty—this little world—
This precious stone set in the silver sea—
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious surge
Of watery Neptune.” SHAKSPERE.

ALMOST every historian has set out by regretting how little is known of the early inhabitants of Great Britain—a fact which only the lovers of hoar antiquity deplore, since from all we can with certainty glean from the pages of contemporary history, we should find but little more to interest us than if we possessed written records of the remotest origin of the Red Indians; for both would alike but be the history of an unlettered and uncivilized race. The same dim obscurity, with scarcely an exception, hangs over the primeval inhabitants of every other country; and if we lift up the mysterious curtain which has so long fallen over and concealed the past, we only obtain glimpses of obscure hieroglyphics; and from the unmeaning fables of monsters and giants, to which the rudest nations trace their origin, we but glance backward and backward, to find that civilized Rome and classic Greece can produce no better authorities than old undated traditions, teeming with fabulous accounts of heathen gods and god-

desses. What we can see of the remote past through the half-darkened twilight of time, is as of a great and unknown sea, on which some solitary ship is afloat, whose course we cannot trace through the shadows which everywhere deepen around her, nor tell what strange land lies beyond the dim horizon to which she seems bound. The dark night of mystery has for ever settled down upon the early history of our island, and the first dawning which throws the shadow of man upon the scene, reveals a rude hunter, clad in the skins of beasts of the chase, whose path is disputed by the maned and shaggy bison, whose rude hut in the forest fastnesses is pitched beside the lair of the hungry wolf, and whose first conquest is the extirpation of these formidable animals. And so, in a few words, might the early history of many another country be written. The shores of Time are thickly strown with the remains of extinct animals, which, when living, the eye of man never looked upon, as if from the deep sea of Eternity had heaved up one wave, which washed over and blotted out for ever all that was coëval with her silent and ancient reign, leaving a monument upon the confines of this old and obliterated world, for man in a far and future day to read, on which stands ever engraven the solemn sentence, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further!*"—beyond this boundary all is Mine! Neither does this mystery end here, for around the monuments which were reared by the earliest inhabitants of Great Britain, there still reigns a deep darkness; we know not what hand piled together the rude remains of Stonehenge; we have but few records of the manners, the customs, or the religion of the early Britons; here and there a colossal barrow heaves up above the dead; we look within, and find a few bones, a few rude weapons, either used in the war or the chase, and these are all; and we linger in wonderment around such remains. Who those ancient voyagers were that first called England the Country of Sea Cliffs we know not; and while we sit and brood over the rude fragments of the Welsh Triads, we become so entangled in doubt and mystery as to look upon the son of Aedd the Great, and the Island of Honey to which he sailed, and wherein he found no man alive, as the pleasing dream of some old and forgotten poet; and we set out again, with no more success, to discover who were the earliest inhabitants of England, leaving the ancient Cymri and the country of Summer behind, and the tall, silent cliffs, to stand as they had done for ages, looking over a wide and mastless sea. We then

look among the ancient names of the headlands, and harbours, and mountains, and hills, and valleys, and endeavour to trace a resemblance to the language spoken by some neighbouring nation, and we only glean up a few scattered words, which leave us still in doubt, like a confusion of echoes, one breaking in upon the other, a minglement of Celtic, Pictish, Gaulish, and Saxon sounds, where if for a moment but one is audible and distinct, it is drowned by other successive clamours which come panting up with a still louder claim, and in very despair we are compelled to step back again into the old primeval silence. There we find Geology looking daringly into the formation of the early world, and boldly proclaiming, that there was a period of time when our island heaved up bare and desolate amid the silence of the surrounding ocean,—when on its ancient promontories and grey granite peaks not a green branch waved, nor a blade of grass grew, and no living thing, saving the tiny corals, as they piled dome upon dome above the naked foundations of this early world, stirred in the “deep profound” which reigned over those sleeping seas. Onward they go, boldly discoursing of undated centuries that have passed away, during which they tell us the ocean swarmed with huge, monstrous forms; and that all those countless ages have left to record their flight are but the remains of a few extinct reptiles and fishes, whose living likenesses never again appeared in the world. To another measureless period are we fearlessly carried—so long as to be only numbered in the account of Time which Eternity keeps—and other forms, we are told, moved over the floors of dried-up oceans—vast animals which no human eye ever looked upon alive; these, they say, also were swept away, and their ponderous remains had long mingled with and enriched the earth; but man had not as yet appeared; nor in any corner of the whole wide world do they discover in the deep-buried layers of the earth a single vestige of the remains of the human race. What historian, then, while such proofs as these are before his eyes, will not hesitate ere he ventures to assert who were the first inhabitants of any country, whence they came, or at what period that country was first peopled? As well might he attempt a description of the scenery over which the mornings of the early world first broke,—of summit and peak which, they say, ages ago, have been hurled down, and ground and powdered into atoms. What matters it about the date

when such things once were, or at what time or place they first appeared? We can gaze upon the gigantic remains of the mastodon or mammoth, or on the grey, silent ruins of Stonehenge, but at what period of time the one roamed over our island, or in what year the other was first reared, will for ever remain a mystery. The earth beneath our feet is lettered over with proofs that there was an age in which these extinct monsters existed, and that period is unmarked by any proof of the existence of man in our island. And during those not improbable periods when oceans were emptied and dried up, amid the heaving up and burying of rocks and mountains, — when volcanoes reddened the dark midnights of the world, when “the earth was without form, and void,” — what mind can picture aught but His Spirit “moving upon the face of the waters,” — what mortal eye could have looked upon the rocking and reeling of those chaotic ruins when their rude forms first heaved up into the light? Is not such a world stamped with the imprint of the Omnipotent, — from when He first paved its foundation with enduring granite, and roofed it over with the soft blue of heaven, and lighted it by day with the glorious sun, and hung out the moon and stars to gladden the night; until at last He fashioned a world beautiful enough for the abode of His “own image” to dwell in, before He created man? And what matters it whether or not we believe in all these mighty epochs? Surely it is enough for us to discover throughout every change of time the loving-kindness of God for mankind; we see how fitting this globe was at last for his dwelling-place; that before the Great Architect had put this last finish to His mighty work, instead of leaving us to starve amid the Silurian sterility, He prepared the world for man, and in place of the naked granite, spread out a rich carpet of verdure for him to tread upon, then flung upon it a profusion of the sweetest flowers. Let us not, then, daringly stand by, and say thus it was fashioned, and so it was formed, but by our silence acknowledge that it never yet entered into the heart of man to conceive how the Almighty Creator laid the foundation of the world.

To His great works must we ever come with reverential knee, and before them lowly bow; for the grey rocks, and the high mountain summits, and the wide-spreading plains, and the ever-sounding seas, are stamped with the image of Eternity, — a mighty shadow ever hangs over them. The grey and weather-beaten headlands still look over the sea, and

the solemn mountains still slumber under their old midnight shadows; but what human ear first heard the murmur of the waves upon the beaten beach, or what human foot first climbed up those high-piled summits, we can never know.

What would it benefit us could we discover the date when our island was buried beneath the ocean; when what was dry land in one age became the sea in another; when volcanoes glowed angrily under the dark skies of the early world, and huge extinct monsters bellowed, and roamed, and swam, through the old forests and the ancient rivers which have perhaps ages ago been swept away? What could we find more to interest us were we in possession of the names, the ages, and the numbers, of the first adventurers who were perchance driven by some storm upon our sea-beaten coast, than what is said in the ancient Triad before alluded to? "there were no more men alive, nor anything but bears, wolves, beavers, and the oxen with the high prominence," when Aedd landed upon the shores of England. What few traces we have of the religious rites of the early inhabitants of Great Britain vary but little from such as have been brought to light by modern travellers who have landed in newly-discovered countries in our own age. They worshipped idols, and had no knowledge of the true God, and saving in those lands where the early patriarchs dwelt, the same Egyptian darkness settled over the whole world. The ancient Greeks and Romans considered all nations, excepting themselves, barbarians; nor do the Chinese of the present day look upon us in a more favourable light; while we, acknowledging their antiquity as a nation, scarcely number them amongst such as are civilized. We have yet to learn by what hands the round towers of Ireland were reared, and by what race the few ancient British monuments that still remain were piled together, ere we can enter those mysterious gates which open upon the History of the Past. We find the footprint of man there, but who he was, or whence he came, we know not; he lived and died, and whether or not posterity would ever think of the rude monuments he left behind concerned him not; whether the stones would mark the temple in which he worshipped, or tumble down and cover his grave, concerned not his creed; with his hatchet of stone, and spear-head of flint, he hewed his way from the cradle to the tomb, and under the steep barrow he knew that he should sleep his last sleep, and, with his arms folded upon his breast, he left "the dead past to bury its dead." He lived not for us.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANCIENT BRITONS.

“ Where the maned bison and the wolf did roam,
 The ancient Briton reared his wattled home,
 Paddled his coracle across the mere,
 In the dim forest chased the antlered deer;
 Pastured his herds within the open glade,
 Played with his ‘ young barbarians’ in the shade;
 And when the new moon o’er the high hills broke,
 Worshipped his heathen gods beneath the sacred oak.”

THE OLD FOREST.

ALTHOUGH the origin of the early inhabitants of Great Britain is still open to many doubts, we have good evidence that at a very remote period the descendants of the ancient Cimmerii, or Cymry, dwelt within our island, and that from the same great family sprang the Celtic tribe; a portion of which at that early period inhabited the opposite coast of France. At what time the Cymry and Celts first peopled England we have not any written record, though there is no lack of proof that they were known to the early Phœnician voyagers many centuries before the Roman invasion, and that the ancient Greeks were acquainted with the British Islands by the name of the Cassiterides, or the Islands of Tin. Thus both the Greeks and Romans indirectly traded with the very race, whose ancestors had shaken the imperial city with their arms, and rolled the tide of battle to those classic shores where “bald, blind Homer” sung. They were the undoubted offspring of the dark Cimmerii of antiquity, those dreaded indwellers of caves and forests, those brave barbarians whose formidable helmets were surmounted by the figures of gaping and hideous monsters; who wore high nodding crests to make them look taller and more terrible in battle, considering death on the hard-fought field as the crowning triumph of all earthly glory. From this race sprang those ancient British tribes who presented so bold a front to Julius Cæsar, when his Roman galleys first ploughed the waves that washed their storm-beaten shores. Beyond this contemporary history carries us not; and the Welch traditions go no further back than to state that when the son of Aedd first

sailed over the hazy ocean, the island was uninhabited, which we may suppose to mean that portion on which he and his followers landed, and where they saw no man alive, for we cannot think that it would long remain unpeopled, visible as it is on a clear day from the opposite coast of Gaul, and beyond which great nations had then for centuries flourished. What few records we possess of the ancient Britons, reveal a wild and hardy race; yet not so much dissimilar to the social position of England in the present day, as may at a first glance appear. They had their chiefs and rulers who wore armour, and ornaments of gold and silver; and these held in subjection the poorer races who lived upon the produce of the chase, the wild fruits and roots which the forest and the field produced, and wore skins, and dwelt in caverns, which they hewed out of the old grey rocks. They were priest-ridden by the ancient druids, who cursed and excommunicated without the aid of either bell, book, or candle; burned and slaughtered all unbelievers just as well as Mahomet himself, or the bigoted fanatics, who in a later day did the same deeds under the mask of the Romish religion. For centuries after, mankind had not undergone so great a change as they at the first appear to have done; there was the same love of power, the same shedding of blood, and those who had not courage to take the field openly, and seize upon what they could boldly, burnt, and slew, and sacrificed their fellow-men under the plea that such offerings were acceptable to the gods.

By the aid of the few hints which are scattered over the works of the Greek and Roman writers, the existence of a few remaining monuments, and the discoveries which have many a time been made through numberless excavations, we can just make out, in the hazy evening of the past, enough of the dim forms of the ancient Britons to see their mode of life, their habits in peace and war, as they move about in the twilight shadows which have settled down over two thousand years. That they were a tall, large-limbed, and muscular race, we have the authority of the Roman writers to prove; who, however, add but little in praise of the symmetry of their figures, though they were near half a foot higher than their distant kindred the Gauls. They wore their hair long and thrown back from the forehead, which must have given them a wild look in the excitement of battle, when their long curling locks would

heave and fall with every blow they struck; the upper lip was unshaven, and the long tufts drooped over the mouth, thus adding greatly to their grim and warlike appearance. Added to this, they cast aside their upper garments when they fought, as the brave Highlanders were wont to do a century or two ago, and on their naked bodies were punctured all kinds of monsters, such as no human eye had ever beheld. Claudian mentions the "fading figures on the dying Pict;" the dim deathly blue that they would fade into, as the life-blood of the rude warrior ebbed out, upon the field of battle.

How different must have been the landscape which the fading rays of the evening sunset gilded in that rude and primitive age. Instead of the tall towers and walled cities, whose glittering windows now flash back the golden light, the sinking rays gilded a barrier of felled trees in the centre of the forest which surrounded the wattled and thatched huts of those ancient herdsmen, throwing its crimson rays upon the clear space behind, in which his herds and flocks were pastured for the night; while all around heaved up the grand and gloomy old forest, with its shadowy thickets, and dark dingles, and woody vallies untrodden by the foot of man. There was then the dreaded wolf to guard against, the unexpected rush of the wild boar, the growl of the grizzly bear, and the bellowing of the maned bison to startle him from his slumber. Nor less to be feared the midnight marauder from some neighbouring tribe, whom neither the dreaded fires of the heathen druids, nor the awful sentence which held accursed all who communicated with him after the doom was uttered, could keep from plunder, whenever an opportunity presented itself. The subterraneous chambers in which their corn was stored might be emptied before morning; the wicker basket which contained their salt (brought far over the distant sea by the Phœnicians or some adventurous voyager) might be carried away; and no trace of the robber could be found through the pathless forest, and the reedy morass by which he would escape, while he startled the badger with his tread, and drove the beaver into his ancient home; for beside the druids there were those who sowed no grain, who drank up the beverage their neighbours brewed from their own barley, and ate up the curds which they had made from the milk of their own herds. These were such as dug up the "pig-nuts," still eaten by the children in the northern counties at the present day; who struck down the

deer, the boar, and the bison in the wild unenclosed forest—kindled a fire with the dried leaves and dead branches, then threw themselves down at the foot of the nearest oak, when their rude repast was over, and with their war-hatchet, or hunting-spear, firmly grasped, even in sleep, awaited the first beam of morning, unless awoke before by the howl of the wolf, or the thundering of the boar through the thicket. They left the fish in their vast rivers untouched, as if they preferred only that food which could be won by danger; from the timid hare they turned away, to give chase to the antlered monarch of the forest; they let the wild goose float upon the lonely mere, and the plumed duck swim about the broad lake undisturbed. There was a wild independence in their forest life—they had but few wants, and where nature no longer supplied these from her own uncultivated stores, they looked abroad and harassed the more civilized and industrious tribes.

Although there is but little doubt that the British chiefs, and those who dwelt on the sea-coast, and opened a trade with the Gaulish merchants, lived in a state of comparative luxury, when contrasted with the wilder tribes who inhabited the interior of the island, still there is something simple and primitive in all that we can collect of their domestic habits. Their seats consisted of three-legged stools, no doubt sawn crossways from the stem of the tree, and three holes made to hold the legs, like the seats which are called “crickets,” that may be seen in the huts of the English peasantry in the present day. Their beds consisted of dried grass, leaves, or rushes spread upon the floor—their covering, the dark blue cloak or sagum which they wore out of doors; or the dried skins of the cattle they slew, either from their own herds or in the chase. They ate and drank from off wooden trenchers, and out of bowls rudely hollowed: they were not without a rough kind of red earthenware, badly baked, and roughly formed. They kept their provisions in baskets of wicker-work, and made their boats of the same material, over which they stretched skins to keep out the water. They kindled fires on the floors of their thatched huts, and appear to have been acquainted with the use of coal as fuel, though there is little doubt that they only dug up such as lay near the surface of the earth; but it was from the great forests which half covered their island that they principally procured their fuel. They had also boats, not unlike the canoes still in use amongst

the Indians, which were formed out of the hollow trunk of a tree ; and some of which have been found upwards of thirty feet in length ; and in these, no doubt, they ventured over to the opposite coast of France, and even Ireland, when the weather was calm. Diodorus says, that amongst the Celtic tribes there was a simplicity of manners very different to that craft and wickedness which mankind then exhibited—that they were satisfied with frugal sustenance, and avoided the luxuries of wealth. The boundaries of their pastures consisted of such primitive marks as upright stones, reminding us of the patriarchal age and the scriptural anathema of “cursed is he who removeth his neighbour’s land-mark.” Their costume was similar to that worn by their kindred the Gauls, consisting of loose lower garments, a kind of waistcoat with wide sleeves, and over this a cloak, or sagum, made of cloth or skin ; and when of the former, dyed blue or black, for they were acquainted with the art of dyeing ; and some of them wore a cloth, chequered with various colours. The chiefs wore rings of gold, silver, or bronze, on their forefingers ; they had also ornaments, such as bracelets and armlets of the same metal, and a decoration called the torque, which was either a collar or a belt formed of gold, silver, or bronze, and which fastened behind by a strong hook. Several of these ornaments have been discovered, and amongst them, one of gold, which weighed twenty-five ounces. It seems to have been something like the mailed gorget of a later day, worn above the cuirass or coat of mail, to protect the neck and throat in battle ; their shoes appear to have been only a sole of wood or leather, fastened to the foot by thongs cut from off the raw hides of oxen they had slaughtered. The war weapons of the wilder tribes in the earlier times, were hatchets of stone, and arrows headed with flint, and long spears pointed with sharpened bone ; but long before the Roman invasion, the more civilized were in possession of battle-axes, swords, spears, javelins, and other formidable instruments of war, made of a mixture of copper and tin. Many of these instruments have been discovered in the ancient barrows where they buried their dead ; and were, no doubt, at first procured from the merchants with whom they traded—ignorant, perhaps, for a long period, that they were produced from the very material they were giving for them in exchange. In battle they also bore a circular shield, coated with the same metal ; this they held in the hand by the

centre bar that went across the hollow inner space from which the boss projected.

But the war-chariots which they brought into battle were of all things the most dreaded by the Romans. From the axles projected those sharp-hooked formidable scythes, which appalled even the bravest legions, and made such gaps in their well-trained ranks, as struck their boldest generals aghast. These were drawn by such horses as, by their fire and speed, won the admiration of the invaders; for fleet on foot as deer, and with their dark manes streaming out like banners, they rushed headlong, with thundering tramp, into the armed ranks of the enemy; the sharp scythes cutting down every obstacle they came in contact with. With fixed eyes the fearless warrior hurled his pointed javelins in every direction as he rushed thundering on—sometimes making a thrust with his spear or sword, as he swept by with lightning-speed, or dragged with him for a few yards the affrighted foeman he had grasped while passing, and whose limbs those formidable weapons mangled at every turn until the dreaded Briton released his hold. Now stepping upon the pole, he aimed a blow at the opponent who attempted to check his speed—then he stopped his quick-footed coursers in a moment, as if a bolt from heaven had alighted, and struck them dead, while some warrior who was watching their onward course fell dead beneath so unexpected a blow; and ere the sword of his companion was uplifted to revenge his death, the Briton and his chariot were far away, hewing a new path through the centre of veteran ranks, which the stormy tide of battle had never before broken. The form of the tall warrior, leaning over his chariot with glaring eye and clenched teeth, would, by his valour and martial deportment, have done honour to the plains of Troy, and won an immortal line from Homer himself, had he but witnessed those deeds achieved by the British heroes in a later day. What fear of death had they before their eyes who believed that their souls passed at once into the body of some brave warrior, or that they but quitted the battle-field to be admitted into the abodes of the gods? They sprang from a race whose mothers and wives had many a time hemmed in the back of battle, and with their own hands struck down the first of their tribe who fled,—sparing neither father, husband, brother, nor son, if he once turned his back upon the enemy: a race whose huge war-drums had, centuries before, sounded in Greek and Roman combats. And from this

hardy stock, which drooped awhile beneath the pruning arms of civilized Rome, was the Gothic grandeur of the Saxon stem grafted, and when its antique roots had been manured by the bones of thousands of misbelieving Danes, and its exuberant shoots lopped by the swords of the Norman chivalry, there sprang up that mighty tree, the shadows of whose branches stretch far away over the pathless ocean, reaching to the uttermost ends of the earth.

CHAPTER III.

THE DRUIDS.

“ ——— You Druids now maintain
Your barbarous rites, and sacrifice again;
You what heaven is, and gods alone can tell,
Or else alone are ignorant: you dwell
In vast and desert woods; you teach no spirit,
Pluto's pale kingdom can by death inherit:
They in another world inform again,
The space betwixt two lives is all the death.”

LUCAN'S PHARSALIA, *T. May's Translation*, 1635.

To Julius Cæsar we are indebted for the clearest description of the religious rites and ceremonies of the Druids; and as he beheld them administered by these Priests to the ancient Britons, so they had no doubt existed for several centuries before the Roman invasion, and are therefore matters of history, prior to that period. There was a wild poetry about their heathenish creed, something gloomy, and grand, and supernatural in the dim, dreamy old forests where their altars were raised: in the deep shadows which hung over their rude grey cromlechs, on which the sacred fire burned. We catch glimpses between the gnarled and twisted stems of those magnificent and aged oaks of the solemn-looking druid, in his white robe of office, his flowing beard blown for a moment aside, and breaking the dark green of the underwood with the lower portion of his sweeping drapery, while he stands like a grave enchanter, his deep sunk and terrible eyes fixed upon the blue smoke as it curls upward amid the foliage—fixed, yet only to appearance; for let but a light and wanderin^g expression

pass over one single countenance in that assembled group, and those deep grey piercing eyes would be seen glaring in anger upon the culprit, and whether it were youth or maiden they would be banished from the sacrifice, and all held accursed who dared to commune with them—a curse more terrible than that which knelled the doom of the excommunicated in a later day. There were none bold enough to extinguish the baleful fire which was kindled around the wicker idol, when its angry flames went crackling above the heads of the human victims who were offered up to appease their brutal gods. In the centre of their darksome forests were their rich treasures piled together, the plunder of war; the wealth wrested from some neighbouring tribe; rich ornaments brought by unknown voyagers from distant countries in exchange for the tin which the island produced; or trophies won by the British warriors who had fought in the ranks of the Gauls on the opposite shore—all piled without order together, and guarded only by the superstitious dread which they threw around everything they possessed; for there ever hung the fear of a dreadful death over the head of the plunderer who dared to touch the treasures which were allotted to the awful druids. They kept no written record of their innermost mysteries, but amid the drowsy rustling of the leaves and the melancholy murmuring of the waters which ever flowed around their wooded abodes, they taught the secrets of their cruel creed to those who for long years had aided in the administration of their horrible ceremonies, who without a blanched cheek or a quailing heart had grown grey beneath the blaze of human sacrifices, and fired the wicker pile with an unshaken hand—these alone were the truly initiated. They left the younger disciples to mumble over matters of less import—written doctrines which taught how the soul passed into other bodies in never-ending succession; but they permitted them not to meddle in matters of life and death; and many came from afar to study a religion which armed the druids with more than sovereign power. All law was administered by the same dreaded priests; no one dared to appeal from their awful decree; he who was once sentenced had but to bow his head and obey—rebellion was death, and a curse was thundered against all who ventured to approach him; from that moment he became an outcast amongst mankind. To impress the living with a dread of their power even after death, they hesitated not in their doctrines to proclaim, that they held

control over departed and rebellious souls; and in the midnight winds that went wailing through the shadowy forests, they bade their believers listen to the cry of the disembodied spirits who were moaning for forgiveness, and were driven by every blast that blew against the opening arms of the giant oaks; for they gave substance to shadows, and pointed out forms in the dark-moving clouds to add to the terrors of their creed. They worshipped the sun and moon, and ever kept the sacred fire burning upon some awful altar which had been reddened by the blood of sacrifice. They headed the solemn processions to springs and fountains, and muttered their incantations over the moving water, for, next to fire, it was the element they held in the highest veneration. But their grand temples—like Stonehenge—stood in the centre of light, in the midst of broad, open, and spacious plains, and there the great Beltian fire was kindled; there the distant tribes congregated together, and unknown gods were evoked, whose very names have perished, and whose existence could only be found in the wooded hill, the giant tree, or the murmuring spring or fountain, over which they were supposed to preside. There sat the arch-druid, in his white surplice, the shadow of the mighty pillars of rough-hewn stone chequering the stony rim of that vast circle—from his neck suspended the wonderful egg which his credulous believers said fell from twined serpents, that vanished hissing high in the air, after having in vain pursued the mounted horseman who caught it, then galloped off at full speed—that egg, cased in gold, which could by its magical virtues swim against the stream. He held the mysterious symbol of office, in his hands more potent than the sceptre swayed by the most powerful of monarchs that ever sat upon our island throne, as he sat with his brow furrowed by long thought, and ploughed deep by many a meditated plot, while his soul spurned the ignorant herd who were assembled around him, and he bit his haughty lip at the thought that he could devise no further humiliation than to make them kneel and lick the sand on which he stood.

They held the mistletoe which grew on the oak sacred, and on the sixth day of the moon came in solemn procession to the tree on which it grew, and offered up sacrifice, and prepared a feast beneath its hallowed branches, adorning themselves with its leaves, as if they could never sufficiently reverence the tree on which the mistletoe grew, although they named them-

selves druids after the oak. White bulls were dragged into the ceremony; their stiff necks bowed, and their broad foreheads bound to the stem of the tree, while their loud bellowings came in like a wild chorus to the rude anthem which was chaunted on the occasion: these were slaughtered, and the morning sacrifice went streaming up among the green branches. The chief druid ascended the oak, treading haughtily upon the bended backs and broad shoulders of the blinded slaves, who struggled to become stepping-stones beneath his feet, and eagerly bowed their necks that he might trample upon them, while he gathered his white garment in his hand, and drew it aside, lest it should become sullied by touching their homely apparel. Below him stood his brother idolators, their spotless garments outspread ready to catch the falling sprigs of the mistletoe as they dropped beneath the stroke of the golden pruning-knife. Doubtless the solemn mockery ended by the assembled multitude carrying home with them a leaf or a berry each, of the all-healing plant, as it was called, while the druids lingered behind to consume the fatted sacrifice, and forge new fetters to bind down their ignorant followers to their heathenish creed. Still it is on record that they taught their disciples many things concerning the stars and their motion; that they pretended to some knowledge of distant countries, and the nature of the gods they worshipped. Gildas, one of the earliest of our British historians, seeming to write from what he saw, tells us that their idols almost surpassed in number those of Egypt, and that monuments were then to be seen (in his day) of "hideous images, whose frigid, ever-lowering, and depraved countenances still frown upon us both within and outside the walls of deserted cities. We shall not," he says, "recite the names that once were heard on our mountains, that were repeated at our fountains, that were echoed on our hills, and were pronounced over our rivers, because the honours due to the Divinity alone were paid to them by a blinded people." That their religion was but a system of long-practised imposture admits not of a doubt; and as we have proof that they possessed considerable knowledge for that period, it is evident that they had recourse to these devices to delude and keep in subjection their fellow-men, thereby obtaining a power which enabled them to live in comparative idleness and luxury. Such were the ancient Egyptian priests; and such, with but few exceptions, were all who, for many centuries, held mighty nations in thrall

by the mystic powers with which they cunningly clothed idolatry. True, there might be amongst their number a few blinded fanatics, who were victims to the very deceit which they practised upon others, whose faculties fell prostrate before the imaginary idols of their own creation, and who bowed down and worshipped the workmanship of their own hands.

All the facts we are in possession of show that they contributed nothing to the support of the community; they took no share in war, though they claimed their portion of the plunder obtained from it; they were amenable to no tribunal but their own, but only sat apart in their gloomy groves, weaving their dangerous webs in darker folds over the eyes of their blinded worshippers. We see dimly through the shadows of those ancient forests where the druids dwelt; but amongst the forms that move there we catch glimpses of women sharing in their heathen rites; it may be of young and beautiful forms, who had the choice offered them, whether they would become sacrifices in the fires which so often blazed before their grim idols, or share in the solemn mockeries which those darksome groves enshrouded—those secrets which but to whisper abroad would have been death.

The day of reckoning at last came—as it is ever sure to come—and heavy was the vengeance which alighted upon those bearded druids; instead of such living and moving evils, the mute marble of the less offensive gods which the Romans worshipped usurped the places where their blood-stained sacrifices were held. Jupiter frowned coldly down in stone, but he injured not. Mars held his pointed spear aloft, but the dreaded blow never descended. They saw the form of man worshipped, and though far off, it was still a nearer approach to the true Divinity than the wicker idol surrounded with flames, and filled with the writhing and shrieking victims who expired in the midst of indescribable agonies. Hope sat there mute and sorrowful, with her head bowed, and her finger upon her lip, listening for the sound of those wings which she knew would bring Love and Mercy to her aid. She turned not her head to gaze upon those heathenish priests as they were dragged forward to deepen the inhuman stain which sunk deep into the dyed granite of the altar, for she knew that the atmosphere their breath had so long poisoned must be purified before the Divinity could approach; for that bright star which was to illumine the world had not yet arisen in the east. The civilized heathen was

already preparing the way in the wilderness, and sweeping down the ruder barbarism before him. There were Roman galleys before, and the sound of the gospel-trumpet behind; and those old oaks jarred again to their very roots, and the huge circus of Stonehenge shook to its broad centre; for the white cliffs that looked out over the sea were soon to echo back a strange language, for Roman cohorts, guided by Julius Cæsar, were riding upon the waves.

CHAPTER IV.

LANDING OF JULIUS CÆSAR.

"The cliffs themselves are bulwarks strong: the shelves
 And flats refuse great ships: the coast so open
 That every stormy blast may rend their cables,
 Put them from anchor: suffering double war—
 Their men pitched battle—their ships stormy fight;
 For charges 'tis no season to dispute,
 Spend something, or lose all." THE TRUE TROJANS, 1633.

FEW generals could put in a better plea for invading a country than that advanced by Julius Cæsar, for long before he landed in this island, he had had to contend with a covert enemy in the Britons, who frequently threw bodies of armed men upon the opposite coasts, and by thus strengthening the enemy's ranks, protracted the war he had so long waged with the Gauls. To chastise the hardy islanders, overawe and take possession of their country, were but common events to the Roman generals, and Cæsar no doubt calculated that to conquer he had but to show his well-disciplined troops. He was also well aware that the language and religion of the Britons and Gauls were almost the same, and that the island on which his eye was fixed was the great centre and stronghold of the druids; and, not ignorant of the power of these heathen priests, whose mysterious rites banded nation with nation, he doubtless thought, that if he could but once overthrow their altars, he could the more easily march over the ruins to more extended conquests. He had almost the plea of self-defence for setting out to invade England as he did, and such, in reality, is the reason he assigns; and not to

possess the old leaven of ambition to strengthen his purpose, was to lack that which, in a Roman general, swelled into the glory of fame. Renown was the pearl Julius Cæsar came in quest of; he was not a general to lead his legions back to the imperial city, when, after having humbled the pride of the Gauls, he still saw from the opposite coast the island of the presumptuous Britons—barbarians, who had dared to hurl their pointed javelins in the very face of the Roman eagle;—not a man to return home, when, by stretching his arm over that narrow sea, he could gather such laurels as had never yet decked a Roman brow.

The rumour of his intended invasion had already reached the Britons, who, well aware of the victories he had won in the opposite continent, and probably somewhat shaken by the terror which was attached to the name of the Roman conqueror, lost no time in sending over ambassadors with an offer of submission, and hostages. But although Cæsar received the messengers kindly, and sent back with them Comius, a Gaul, in whose talent and integrity he had the greatest confidence, still his attention was not to be diverted from the object he had in view; and much as he commended their pacific promises, he but waited the return of the galley he had sent out to reconnoitre, before he embarked. Nor had he to wait long, for on the fifth day after his departure, Volusenus returned from his expedition, with the meagre information he had been able to glean about the coast without landing; though, such as it was, it induced Cæsar to set sail at once, and, with twelve thousand men and eighty transports, he started from the sea coast which stretches between Calais and Boulogne, and steered for the pale-faced cliffs of Albion. It was in a morning early in autumn, and before the Britons had gathered in their corn-harvest, when the Roman general first reached the British shore; nor can we, from the force which accompanied him, suppose that he was at all surprised to see the white cliffs of Dover covered with armed men ready to oppose his landing. But he was too wary a commander to attempt this in so unfavourable a spot, and in the face of such a force, and therefore resolved to lie by, until past the hour of noon, and await the arrival of the remainder of his fleet; for beside the force which we have already enumerated, there were eighteen transports in which his cavalry were embarked, but these were not destined to take a share in his first victory; so

finding both wind and tide in his favour, he, without their aid, sailed six or seven miles further down the coast, until he reached the low and open shore which stretches between Walmer Castle and Sandwich. This manœuvre, however, was not lost upon the Britons, for as he measured his way over the sea, so did they keep pace with him upon the land, and when he reached the spot which was so soon to be the scene of slaughter, he found the island-army drawn up ready to receive him, with their cavalry and war-chariots placed in the order of battle, while many a half-naked and hardy soldier stood knee-deep amongst the breakers, which beat upon the beach, with pointed javelin, and massy club, and rough-hewn war-hatchet, eager to oppose his landing;—the proud Roman himself confesses that they presented a bold front, and made a brave defence. Superior military skill, and long-practised discipline, together with the formidable war-engines which he brought over in his galleys, and from which showers of missiles were projected that spread death and consternation around, were too much for the Britons, few of whom, except such as had fought in the ranks of the Gauls on the opposite shore, had ever before looked upon such terrible instruments of destruction; and under cover of these, after a short contest, the Roman general managed to disembark two of his legions. But for this mode of warfare, and those dreadful engines opening so suddenly upon them, Cæsar would probably never have been able to land his forces; for we may readily imagine that, unaccustomed as they were to such a mode of attack, the consternation that it spread could scarcely be exceeded by a first-class line-of-battle ship pouring in a broadside amongst the startled savages of the South Sea Islands, whose shores had never before echoed back the thunder of a cannon. Although Cæsar himself states that for a time the Roman soldiers were reluctant to leave their ships, owing to the extent of water which flowed between them and the shore, still there is but little doubt that the fearless front presented by the Britons, as they stood knee-deep among the waves, in spite of the missiles which were sent forth in showers from the Roman galleys, somewhat appalled their highly disciplined invaders. Cæsar has left it on record that his soldiers hesitated to land, until one of his standard-bearers, belonging to the tenth legion, sprang from the side of the galley into the sea, and waving the ensign over his head, exclaimed, “Follow me, my fellow-soldiers! unless you will give up your

eagle to the enemy. I, at least, will do my duty to the republic and to our general." It was then, roused by the example of the courageous standard-bearer, that the Roman soldiers quitted their ships, and the combatants met hand to hand.

Although upon that ancient battle-ground have the winds and waves for nearly two thousand years beaten, and scarcely a name is left of those who fought, and fell, and dyed the stormy sea-beach with their blood; still, as we gaze down the dim vista of years, the mind's eye again catches glimpses of the unknown combatants—of the warm autumn sunshine falling upon those white and distant cliffs—of the high-decked Roman galleys rising above the ever-moving waves, and we seem to hear the deep voice of the Roman general rising beyond the murmur of the ocean; we see the gilded eagle rocking and swaying over the contending ranks, as they are driven forward or repulsed, just as the tide of battle ebbs and flows; and ever upon the beaten beach where the waves come and go, they wash over some mangled and prostrate form, throwing up here a helmet and there a shield, while figures of the mailed Roman, and the half-naked Briton, lie dead and bleeding side by side, their deep sleep unbroken by the shout, and tramp, and tumult of war. The javelin with its leathern thong lies useless beside the bare brawny arm that could hurl it to within an inch of its mark, then recover it again without stepping from out the ranged rank; the dreaded spear lies broken, and the sharp head trodden deep into the sand by a Roman foot-step. Higher up the beach, we hear the thunder of the scythe-wheeled war chariots of the Britons, and catch glimpses of the glittering and outstretched blades, as they sparkle along in their swift career like a silvery meteor, and all we can trace of their course is the zig-zag pathway streaked with blood. Faint, and afar off, we hear the voices of the bearded druids hymning their war-chaunt, somewhere beyond the tall summits of the bald-faced cliffs. Anon, the roar of battle becomes more indistinct—slowly and reluctantly the Britons retreat,—the Roman soldiers pursue them not, but fall back again upon their galleys, and we hear only a few groans, and the lapping of the waves upon the sea-shore. And such might have been a brief summary of that combat, interspersed here and there with the daring deeds of warriors whose names will never be known; and then the eye of the imagination closes upon the scene, and all again is enveloped in the deep darkness of nearly two thousand years.

As the Roman cavalry had not yet arrived, Cæsar was prevented from following up the advantage he had gained over the Britons, and marching to where they were encamped, a little way within the island. The natives, however, doubtless to gain time, and better prepare themselves for a second attack, sent messengers to the Roman general, who were deputed to offer hostages as a guarantee of their submission to the Roman arms. They also liberated Comius, whom he had sent over with offers of alliance; and after a sharp rebuke, in which the Roman invader no doubt attempted to show how wrong it was on their part to attempt to oppose his landing and seizing upon their island, he forgave them, on condition that they would send him a given number of hostages, and allow him, without interference, to act as he chose for the future. Such, in spirit, were the terms on which the haughty conqueror dismissed the British chiefs, who probably returned with the determination of breaking them whenever an opportunity presented itself. A few hostages were, however, delivered, and several of the British leaders presented themselves before Cæsar, perhaps as covert spies, although they came with avowed offers of allegiance, smarting as they were under their recent defeat.

The Roman general was not destined to accomplish his conquest without meeting with some disasters. The vessels which contained his cavalry, and were unable to accompany the first portion of his fleet, were again doomed to be driven back by a tempest upon the coast of Gaul, even after they had approached so near the British shore as to be within view of Cæsar's encampment. The fatal night that saw his cavalry dashed back upon the opposite coast, also witnessed the destruction of several of his galleys, which were drawn up on the beach behind his encampment; while those that were lying at anchor in the distant roadstead were either wrecked or cast upon the shore, and so battered by the winds and waves as to be wholly unfit for sea-service; for a high tide seemed to have rushed over his galleys; and this, together with the storm, scarcely left him in the possession of a vessel in which he could put out to sea with his troops. Without either provisions to feed his soldiers, or materials to repair his shattered ships, and his whole camp deeply dispirited by these unforeseen calamities, the Roman general found himself, at the close of autumn, on a stormy and unfriendly coast, and in possession of but little more of the

island than the barren beach on which he had won his hitherto useless victory. The Britons were not long before they discovered the full extent of these disasters; frequent visits to the Roman encampment had also made them better acquainted with the number of the troops; and as they had already measured their strength against the Roman arms, and the Roman weapons had doubtless lost much of their former terror in their eyes, they began to make preparations for sweeping off the whole force of the invading army, for they clearly saw that it was without either provisions, cavalry, or ships; and though they commenced their work cautiously, they made sure of obtaining an easy victory, and such as they thought would intimidate the hearts of all future invaders. Cæsar was too wary a general not to see through their designs, for he perceived that the visits of the chiefs to his encampment were less frequent than formerly; that they were also slow in sending in the hostages they had promised to give up; so, Roman-like, he determined to arm himself against the worst. He ordered some of his troops to repair such ships as were sea-worthy, out of the wreck of those which were useless; these, when ready, he sent over to Gaul for stores; others of his soldiers he sent out to scour the country in search of provisions, and to gather in whatever corn they could find, which must have been very trifling, as he states that, except in one field, all beside in the neighbourhood had been harvested. In this field, which stood at a short distance from one of those old primeval forests which everywhere abounded in the island, one of his legions were busily engaged gathering in corn, when they were suddenly attacked by the armed islanders, who rushed out of their hiding-places from the neighbouring thicket. Fortunately for the Roman soldiers, this chanced to be no great distance from their encampment; and as the ever-watchful eye of Cæsar was open while he stood looking out from his strong fortifications, he saw a huge cloud of dust rising in the air in the direction of the distant corn-field, and sallying out of the encampment, at the head of two of his cohorts, he bade the remainder of the legion follow him with the utmost speed, and rushed off to the rescue of his soldiers. A few more minutes and he would have arrived too late to save any of them, for he found his legion, which had already suffered considerable loss, hemmed in on every side by the cavalry and war-chariots of the Britons; and he had no sooner succeeded in withdrawing his



Combat between the Romans and Britons.



engaged forces from the corn-field, than he hurried back to his strong entrenchments, the brave islanders having compelled him to make a hasty retreat. Several days of heavy rain followed, luring which the Roman general confined his soldiers to the camp. But the hardy Britons were not to be deterred by the elements from following up the slight advantage which they had gained; so mustering a strong force of both horse and foot, they drew up and surrounded the Roman entrenchments. Cæsar was too brave to sit quietly down and be bearded in his own stronghold by an army of barbarians; so watching a favourable moment, he marshalled forth his mailed legions, which were by this time strengthened by a small body of cavalry that had returned with Comius from Gaul; and with these he fell upon the Britons and dispersed them with great slaughter, also pursuing them into the country, and setting fire to many of their huts, before he again returned to his encampment. The Britons, as before, sued for peace, which Cæsar readily granted, as he was anxious to return to Gaul with his leaky ships and wearied troops; nor did he wait to receive the offered hostages, but with the first fair wind set sail, having gained but little more than hard blows by this his first invasion.

The warm spring days which brought back the swallow from over the sea, saw the Roman galleys again riding on the sunny waves that broke upon our rock-girt coast. From the surrounding heights and smooth slopes which dipped gently down into the sea, the assembled Britons beheld eight hundred vessels of various sizes hastening shoreward from the opening ocean. Amid waving crests and glittering coats of mail, and Roman eagles blazing like gold in the distance, and long javelins whose points shone like silver in the sunlight, as they rose high above the decks of the galleys, they came rolling along like a moving forest of spears, swayed aside for a moment as some restive war-steed, impatient to plant his sharp hoof upon the earth, jerked his haughty neck, and shook out his long dark mane upon the refreshing breeze, while his shrill neigh came ringing upon the beach above the hoarse murmur of the breakers, which rolled at the feet of the terrified Britons. On those decks were above thirty thousand Roman soldiers assembled, headed again by Julius Cæsar, and now strengthened by two thousand cavalry. It is said that the excuse offered by the Roman general for this

his second invasion, was, that hostages had not been sent in according to treaty, though the truth beyond doubt is, that his ambition was dissatisfied with the hasty retreat he was compelled to make; his pride mortified at the bold front the islanders had presented. for he must have felt, in his hurried departure to Gaul, that he bore back but little to entitle him to the much-coveted name of Conqueror, a name which his wars with the Britons never won him, for even Tacitus deigned to honour him with little more than the title of Discoverer, after all his exploits in our island had terminated. Unlike his former reception, he this time landed without having to strike a blow, for the sight of such an armed host struck terror into the hearts of the natives, and they fled in the direction of the Stour, or near to that neighbourhood where Canterbury now stands. A proof how earnestly Cæsar commenced his second campaign in the island, and how resolved he was to bring the war to a speedy end, is found, in his setting out at midnight to pursue the Britons, scarcely leaving a sixth part of his army behind, to protect his shipping and encampment. Perchance, the haughty Roman had boasted how soon he would bring over a few of the barbaric chiefs for his friends, and add to their stock of foreign curiosities a few dozens of war-chariots, and had laughed amongst his officers at the joke of their being picked up by some island warrior, and carried off in his scythe-armed car by a couple of swift-footed steeds. He frequently wrote to Rome, and perhaps occasionally boasted in his epistles, what speedy work he would make of the conquest of Britain. Be this as it may, there is proof in the strength of the force which he this time landed, that he already began to appreciate aright the brave blood that flowed through those ancient British veins.

In the still depth of midnight did the measured tramp of Roman infantry ring upon the silence, as they strode inland towards the heart of Kent, and beside those old forests and reedy morasses was the heavy tread of Cæsar's cavalry heard; the rattle of their mail, and the jingling of their harness, broken by the short answers of the scouts as they rode hastily in and out, announcing a clear course, or with low obeisance receiving the commands of the general. We may picture some poor peasant startled from his sleep by that armed throng, dragged out of his wattled hut by the side of the wild forest, and rudely handled by the Roman soldiers, because he either refused to tell, or was

ignorant of the position his countrymen had taken up. We may picture the herdsman hurrying his flocks into the forest fastnesses as he heard that solemn and distant tramp coming like subdued thunder upon the night-breeze, so unlike the wild shoutings and mingled rolling of his own war-chariots, amid which the voices of women and children were ever mingled; so solemn, deep, and orderly would march along those well-disciplined Roman troops, contrasted with the irregular movements of the Britons. Cæsar reached the reedy margin of a river in the cold grey dawn of a spring morning; and as the misty vapour cleared up from the face of the water, he beheld the hardy islanders drawn up on the rising ground beyond the opposite bank, ready to dispute the passage if he ventured across. The charge was sounded, and at the first blast of the Roman trumpets the cavalry dashed into the river, and the well-tempered steel blades of the invaders soon began to hew a path through the opposing ranks, for almost at the first stroke the swords of the Britons, which were made of tin and copper, bent, and became useless, while those wielded by their assailants were double-edged, and left a gash every time they descended. The horses broke through the British infantry, as if they had been but a reed fence; and as their cavalry was the heaviest, they met in full career the rush of the island war-chariots, plunged their long javelins into the chests of the horses, and received the shock of the British cavalry on the points of their highly-tempered and strong-shafted spears. The whole affray seemed more like a skirmish than a regular engagement, as if the war-chariots and cavalry of the Britons were only employed to check the advance of the Roman columns, while the remainder of their force retreated to a strong fortification, which stood at some distance in the woods, and which was barricaded by felled trees, fastened together and piled one above another; thither the remainder of the army also fled, leaving the Romans to follow after they had regained the order of march, and sent back to their camp those who were wounded in the skirmish on the river bank. These marches through wild, uncultivated forests were very harassing to the heavy-armed Roman legions, who made but slow progress compared to the light-footed troops of the Britons, for they were inured to this woodland warfare, and as familiar with the forest passes as the antlered deer.

Pursuit was again the order of the day; the stronghold in the

forest was carried by the Romans, and amongst the legions which distinguished themselves in the contest, was the one who, but for the timely arrival of Cæsar, would probably have left their bones to whiten in the harvest-field, from which they had had so narrow an escape in the preceding autumn. Another evening darkened over the forest, under cover of which the Britons again retreated further inland, without being pursued; for the Roman general seemed to have a dread of those gloomy old woods, through which the paths, even in the open noon-day, were rugged, uncertain, and difficult, and were as likely to lead towards some bog, lake, or dangerous morass, as to any of the British fortifications; the Roman soldiers were therefore employed in throwing up intrenchments, and strengthening their position in case of a surprise. It came, but not until morning, and instead of the Britons, was brought by a party of Roman horsemen from the camp; the galleys were again driven upon the shore by the waves, and many of them wrecked; the angry ocean had once more risen up against the fortunes of Cæsar. These unwelcome tidings arrived just as he had given the order to advance; a few minutes more, and he would have been off in full pursuit after the Britons; the unexplored forest stretched before him; his eagles glittered in the morning sunshine; the trumpets had sounded the march, when the order was given to halt, and above twenty thousand armed Romans were compelled to return at the bidding of the waves. The mound they had thrown up was deserted; the river, which had but a few hours before been reddened by the blood of many a brave warrior, was repassed without opposition; and both cavalry and infantry now commenced a rapid retreat in the direction of the Roman encampment. When Cæsar reached the sea-shore, he beheld a sight discouraging enough to blanch even a Roman cheek; many of his finest galleys had become total wrecks; others it seemed almost impossible to repair; the few that were saved he despatched at once to Gaul for assistance, set every hand that could use a saw, axe, or mallet, immediately to work, and instead of sitting down and bemoaning his ill-fortune, he, like a brave-hearted Roman as he was, began to make up for his loss, and gave orders for building several new ships. Added to this, he had the remainder drawn on shore, and ran up a barrier to protect them from the ravages of the ocean, thus including a dry-dock within his fortified encampment. All these preparations necessarily consumed some time, during which the islanders remained undisturbed.

Returning to the Britons, who had not been idle during this brief interval, we find their army greatly increased, and a renowned prince, named Cassivellaunus, placed as commander at the head of the states, they wisely judging that one who had so signalized himself in his wars with the neighbouring tribes, was best fitted to lead them on, now that they were banded together for mutual protection against the Romans. Nobly did the barbaric chief acquit himself; he waited not to be attacked; but having selected his own battle-ground, charged upon the Roman cavalry at once, with his horsemen and war-chariots. Although Cæsar did at last gain a slight victory, and, as he himself says, drove the Britons into the woods, and lost several of his soldiers through venturing too far, still it does not appear that he obtained the day, for the Britons already began to find the advantages they obtained through occasional retreats, which enabled them to draw the enemy either nearer to, or into the woods—a stratagem which in this skirmish they availed themselves of; for while the Romans were busy, as was their custom, in protecting their camp for the night, by throwing up ramparts and digging trenches around it, the Britons sallied out from another opening in the wood, and slaughtered the outer guard. The Roman general ordered two cohorts to advance to the rescue; they were also repulsed, and a tribune was slain; fresh troops were summoned into action, and the Britons betook themselves to their old leafy coverts with but very little loss. On this occasion, the Roman general was compelled to acknowledge, that his heavy-armed soldiers were no match for an enemy who only retreated one moment to advance with greater force the next, and would, whenever an opportunity presented itself, dismount from their horses, or leap out of their chariots, and renew the battle on foot, and that, too, on the very edge of some dangerous bog, where an armed horseman was sure to founder if he but made a leap beyond the boundary line with which they were so familiar. Another day, a disastrous one for the Britons, and the battle was renewed, and they, as before, commenced the attack, waiting, however, until the Roman general had sent out a great portion of his cavalry and infantry to forage—a body amounting to more than half his army, no mean acknowledgment of the estimation in which the island force was held, while it required from ten to fifteen thousand men to collect the supplies he needed for one day; a tolerable proof that he had not forgotten the all but fatal skirmish in the corn-field when he first landed.

Emboldened by their success on the previous day, the Britons this time charged up to the solid body of the Roman legions, rushing fearlessly against the wall which their well-disciplined ranks presented, a firm phalanx, that had withstood the shock of the bravest armies in Europe without being broken—an array strengthened every moment by the return of the foragers. One solid, impenetrable mass now bore down, like a mighty avalanche, upon the congregated Britons; a vast sea of spears, and shields, and swords, all heaving onward without resistance, Cæsar heralding the way, like the God of the storm, the armed cavalry thundering onward like the foremost wave, until the whole mass struck upon the iron stems of the gnarled oaks, which stood at the edge of the forest, then rolled back again into the plain, leaving a ridgy line of wounded and dead to mark their destructive course. It was the first open shore on which the full tide of the Roman arms had flowed on the islanders. The waves had many a time before gathered together and broken, but here the full surge of battle swept uninterrupted upon the beach. Although the sun still sets over that great grave-yard of the dead, not a monument remains to tell of its “whereabout,” or point out the spot where many a brave soldier looked round and took his rest.

Through Kent, and along the valley which stretches at the foot of the Surrey hills, did Cæsar pursue the shattered army of the British prince, his march probably extending over that level line of beautiful meadow-land on which the old palace of Eltham still stands, along the wooded neighbourhood of Penge and Sydenham, and out at the foot of the Norwood hills, to where, far beyond, the Thames still glitters like a belt of silver as it goes winding round near Chertsey. Here the British leader had rallied; on the opposite bank stood his forces, and in the bed of the river he had caused pointed stakes to be planted, to prevent his pursuers from crossing the ford. These were but slight obstacles in the path of Cæsar; he ordered his cavalry to advance, commanded the infantry to follow at their heels, or at their sides, as they best could; and so they passed, some grasping the manes of the war-horses with one hand to steady their steps in the current, while with the other they held the double-edged sword, ready to hew or thrust, the moment they came within arm's length of the enemy. Cassivellaunus was once more compelled to retreat, though never so far but that he was always in readiness to fall upon any detached

cohorts, and with his five thousand war-chariots to hang upon and harass any party of foragers: Cæsar was at last compelled to send out his legions to protect the horsemen while they gathered in provisions. Even then the island prince drove and carried off all the cattle and corn which was pastured or garnered in the neighbourhood of the Roman encampment. The invaders were never safe except when within their own entrenchments; for they had now to deal with an enemy who had grown too wary to trust himself again in the open field, but contented himself by harassing and hanging upon the detached masses which he could waylay. He was well acquainted with all the secret passes and intricate roads, and kept the Roman guards in a continual state of alarm; and when it was not safe to attack them, the Britons would at times suddenly assemble at the outskirts of the woods, and shaking their javelins, to the foot of which a hollow ball of copper, containing lumps of metal or pebbles, was affixed, commence such a sudden thundering and shouting as startled the horses, and caused them to run affrighted in every direction; they then seized upon the forage, and ere the heavy legions could overtake them, they were off at full speed far away in the forest passes, along paths known only to themselves. Such a system of warfare was new even to Cæsar, and as yet he had only gained the ground he encamped upon—that which contained his army, for the time, was all he could call his own.

But the Britons could not long remain true to themselves; petty jealousies and long-stifled murmurs began at last to find vent; one tribe after another came to the Roman camp; to all he made fair promises, took their corn and their hostages, sowing no doubt the seeds of dissension deeper amongst them at the same time, and getting them also to inform him where the capital of their warlike chief was situated, which secret they were base enough to betray; for many of the petty princes envied the renown which Cassivellaunus had won by his valour. Even Cæsar's narrative at this turn of events enlists our sympathies on the side of the British general, and the handful of brave followers who still remained true to their country's cause. His capital, which is supposed to have stood on the site of St. Albans, and which in those days was surrounded by deep woods and broad marshes, was attacked; many were slain, some prisoners taken, and numbers of cattle driven away; for the forest town of this courageous chief appears to have been nothing more than a cluster of woodland huts surrounded by a

ditch, and strengthened by a rampart of mud and trees, a work which the Roman legions would level to the earth in a brief space of time. Though beaten and forced from his capital, the British prince retreated upon another fortress further into the wood; from this he was also driven. Still his great heart buoyed him up; and although defeated, he determined to have another struggle for the liberty of his unworthy country, and despatched messengers into Kent, bidding the Britons to fall at once upon the Roman camp and fleet. Had the prince himself been present, it is not improbable that this daring deed would have been executed, for he was unequalled in falling upon the enemy, and carrying his point by surprise: but he was not; and although the attack did honour to the valour of the brave men of Kent, it failed. Many were slain, and the Romans returned victorious to their camp. It wanted but the genius who meditated so bold a stroke to have carried it into effect; had he been there, Cæsar's eagles would never more have spread out their golden wings beneath the triumphal arches of haughty Rome.

Fain would we here drop the curtain over the name of this ancient British warrior, and leave him to sleep in the heart of his high-piled barrow undisturbed. Alas! he was compelled to sue to the Roman general for peace, who no doubt offered it him willingly, conscious that, had he succeeded in his bold attempt upon the camp and fleet, the Roman would have had to kneel for the same grant at the foot of the Briton. Cæsar demanded hostages, got them, and hurried off to his ships, and without leaving a Roman troop behind, hastened with all his force to the coast of Gaul, and never again did he set foot upon our island shore. Over the future career of Cassivellaunus the deep midnight of oblivion has settled down; the waves of time have washed no further record upon that vast shore which is strewn over with the wrecks of so many mighty deeds; the assembled druids who chaunted his requiem, and the Cymric or Celtic bard who in rude rhymes broke the forest echoes as he recounted his exploits in battle, have all passed away; and but for the pen of his Roman opponent we should never have known the bravery of that British heart, which, nearly two thousand years ago, beat with hopes and fears like our own.

CHAPTER V.

CARACTACUS, BOADICEA,⁷ AND AGRICOLA.

“And many an old man’s sigh, and many a widow’s,
 And many an orphan’s water-standing eye,—
 Men for their sons’, wives for their husbands’ fate,
 And orphans for their parents’ timeless death,—
 Did rue the hour that ever thou wert born.” SHAKSPERE.

FOR nearly a century after the departure of Cæsar, we have no records of the events which transpired in England; that the inhabitants made some progress in civilization during that period is all we know; for there can be but little doubt that a few of the Roman soldiers remained behind, and settled in the island after the first invasion, and introduced some degree of refinement amongst the tribes with whom they peaceably dwelt. No attempt, however, was made, during this long interval, to fortify the island against any future invasion; and when the Roman commander, Plautius, landed, about ninety-seven years after the retirement of Cæsar, he met with no resistance until he had led his army some distance into the inland country. After a time a few skirmishes took place—some of the tribes submitted—but nothing like a determined resistance seems to have been offered to the Roman arms, until Plautius had extended his victories beyond the Severn, and compelled the Britons to retreat into the marshes beside the Thames. Here it was that the Roman commander first learned to estimate aright the valour of the force he had to contend against; for the bogs and swamps which had so often checked the meditated movements of Cæsar, proved nearly fatal to the force headed by Plautius, who, after suffering a severe loss, retreated to a secure position beside the Thames. In this strong encampment he calmly awaited the arrival of the Emperor Claudius, who, after a time, joined him with a considerable reinforcement—just stayed long enough to look round him—received the submission of a few petty states—and then returned most triumphantly to Rome; for it is questionable whether he ever fought a single battle. It is at this period that the figure of Caractacus heaves up slowly above the scene; we see him but dimly and indistinctly at first, but, after a time,

he towers above all his compeers, as Cassivellaunus did in the days of Cæsar. We see him moving now and then between the divided legions commanded by Vespasian and Plautius, but nothing of importance is done on either side. The Isle of Wight is for a short time subdued; a small portion of the island south of the Thames is occupied by the invaders; then Plautius is recalled to Rome, and before he well arrives at the imperial city, the whole camp is in disorder; the Roman legions can no longer protect the states that have submitted to them. Caractacus is up, armed, and in earnest. Ostorius Scapula next appears, and places himself at the head of the Roman ranks, strikes an unexpected blow in the midst of winter, and gains some advantage over the Britons. About this time it appears that the Romans first commenced the erection of forts in the island, thus keeping the conquered states within well-guarded lines, and protecting them from the attacks of the unsubdued tribes, taking good care, at the same time, that they did not escape and join their independent countrymen. His next step was to disarm all the states within these limits; and as some of them had become willing allies, rebellion soon broke out within these circumscribed bounds. Once disarmed, it will readily be imagined how easily they were beaten. Ostorius had now work enough on his hands; the tribes that occupied the present counties of York and Lancashire next arose, attacked the Roman legions, and were defeated. It was then that the ancient Silures sprang up, the bravest of all the British tribes, the true Cimbrii of early renown. The battle-ground now shifts into Wales, and Caractacus is the commander. Almost every mountain-pass and ford were familiar to him; his renown already rang through the island; wherever the Roman eagle had bowed its haughty neck, he had been present; the Roman general knew with whom he had to deal, and moved forward with all his available force. Around the standard of Caractacus had rallied every tribe from the surrounding country, who refused to bow their necks to the invaders. Tacitus says that he chose his ground with great skill, in the centre of steep and difficult hills, raising ramparts of massive stones, where the ascent was possible; while between his army and the road by which the Romans must approach, there flowed a river which it was difficult to ford. As the enemy drew near, he exhorted his soldiers to remember how their forefathers had driven Cæsar from Britain, spake to them



Caractacus carried captive to Rome.

of freedom, their homes, their wives and children, in a style which the Roman historians would have pronounced eloquent, had the address flowed from the mouth of one of their own generals. The Britons again were conquered, though they fought bravely—their naked bosoms and helmetless heads were sure marks for every well-tempered Roman blade, while their own copper swords bent back at the first thrust they made at their mail-clad enemies. Caractacus was not slain, though he only escaped to be given up in chains to the Romans by his treacherous stepmother, Cartismanda, after having for nine years waged war against the invaders of Britain. The British leader was dragged (with his wife and children) a prisoner to Rome; his fame had flown before him, and the Romans, who ever respected valour, crowded round to look at the renowned island chief. He alone, of all the British captives, shrunk not when brought before the Roman emperor, Claudius. There was a noble bearing about the man: that eye which had never quailed before the keen edge of the uplifted blade in battle—that heart which had never sunk, though it was the last to retreat from the hard fought field, buoyed him up in the presence of his enemy, and the noble Roman ordered his chains to be struck off, an act which did honour to the successor of Cæsar. Caractacus would have done the same, had Claudius obtained the same renown, and so stood a captive before him. Whether the brave barbarian died in some contest with a gladiator in the arena of Rome, “butchered to make a holiday” in a later day, before Nero, or returned to his country, or joined the legions of his conquerors, and fell fighting in some foreign land, we know not—we see his chains struck off before the Emperor Claudius, then he vanishes for ever from the page of history.

Even this undoubted victory was of but little advantage to the Roman arms. The Silures proved themselves worthy descendants of the ancient Cymry, the terror of whose name, as we have before shown, had in former times carried consternation even to the very gates of Rome. They broke up the enemy’s camp, fell upon their lines and forts, drove the Roman legions back to their old intrenchments, and, but for the timely arrival of a party of foragers, would have cut up every soldier within the Roman encampment in Wales. Nor could Ostorius, when he brought up all his legions to battle, conquer them again. One skirmish was but the forerunner of another; the Britons

but retreated to-day, to advance with stronger force on the morrow; until at last, harassed and vexed, ever fighting but obtaining no advantage, the commander, who had conquered Caractacus, fortified himself within his camp, and died. He was the bravest general that the Britons had ever looked upon since the days of Cæsar. Pass we by Frontinus, Didius, and Veranius; there are other shadows to pass over this dimly-lighted stage of our history, who "will do strange deeds and then depart."

Wearied and harassed by such a succession of invasions, the chiefs of the druids, with many of the Britons who refused to submit to the Roman yoke, retired to the island of Anglesey, that they might, amid its shadowy groves and deep passes, follow their religious rites without molestation, and sleep securely without being aroused by the din of arms which was ever awakening the echoes that dwelt amongst gloomy Albion's white cliffs. To this island, guarded more by the terrors of superstition than the substantial array of arms, the Roman commander, Paulinus Suetonius, determined to cross; and to accomplish his purpose, he built a number of flat-bottomed boats in which he placed his troops. As the invading force neared the opposite shore, they were struck with terror by the strange scene which rose before them, and many a Roman heart that had never before quailed in the stormy front of battle, stood appalled before the dreaded array which had there congregated. It seemed as if they had reached the shores of the fabulous Hades of their ancient poets; for there women were seen rushing in every direction in dresses on which were woven the forms of dismal objects; and while their long dishevelled hair streamed out in the sea-breeze, they brandished their flaming torches aloft as they rushed to and fro, their eyes glaring wildly out of the dense smoke, as it blew back again in their angry faces, while they looked out "fierce as the furies, terrible as hell." Behind them were the grim druids collected, with hands and eyes uplifted, as they invoked the curses of the gods upon the heads of the Roman legions; before them the huge fires which were already kindled, blazed and crackled, and shot out their consuming tongues of flame, as if they were hungry for their prey, while the druids pointed to the invading force, and bade their warriors hasten and bring their victims to the sacrifice. The Roman soldiers seemed paralysed; they stood almost motionless, as if they had not power to strike a blow. They fell back affrighted before the lighted torches of

the women, and the curses of the druids, which struck more terror into their souls than if the thunder of a thousand war-chariots had borne down upon them, in all their headlong array. Aroused at last by the voice of their leader, who bade them to despise a force of frantic women and praying priests, they rushed boldly on, even to the very foot of the dreaded fires; and many a bearded druid was that day driven before the points of the Roman spears into the devouring flames which they had kindled for the destruction of their invaders. Dreadful was the carnage that ensued; even the sacred groves were fired or cut down; if the Britons escaped the flames, it was but to rush back again upon the points of the Roman swords—the sun sunk upon a scene of desolation and death—a landscape blackened with ashes—fires that had been extinguished by blood, whose grey embers faded and died out, as the last sobs of the expiring victims subsided into the eternal silence of death.

The spirit of British vengeance, though asleep, was not yet dead, and at the rumour of these dreadful deeds it sprang up, awake and armed, on the opposite shore; as if the blow which struck down their sacred groves, and overthrew their ancient altars, had sent a shock across the straits of Menai, which had been felt throughout the whole length and breadth of the land; as if at the fall of the sacred groves of Mona the spirits of the departed dead had rushed across, while the voices of the murdered druids filled all the air with their wailing cries of lamentation, until even women sprang up demanding vengeance, and Boadicea leaped into her war-chariot, as if to rebuke the British warriors by her presence, and to show them that the soul of a woman, loathing their abject slavery, was ready to lead them on to either liberty or death, and to place her fair form in the dangerous front of battle—for her white shoulders had not escaped the mark of the Roman scourge. Her daughters had been violated before her eyes, her subjects driven from their homes, the whole territory of the Iceni over which she reigned as queen groaned again beneath the weight of cruelty, and oppression, and wrong; her subjects were made slaves; her relations were dragged into captivity by the haughty conquerors; her priests slaughtered; her altars overthrown, and another creed thrust into the throats of those over whom she ruled, at the points of the Roman swords. Her sufferings, her birth, the death of her husband king Prasutagus, her towering spirit, her bold demeanour, and the energy of

her address, struck like an electric shock throughout all the surrounding tribes, and many a state which had bowed in abject submission beneath the haughty feet of the conquerors, now sprang up, and as if endowed with a new life, rushed onward to the great mustering ground of battle, like clouds hastening up to join the dark mass which gathers about the dreaded thunder-storm, before the deafening explosion bursts forth.

On the Roman colony of Camaladonum did this terrible tempest first break, scattering before it a whole Roman legion, and scarcely leaving one alive behind to tell the tale. The voices of pity and mercy were unheard amid that dire and revengeful din; no quarter was given, no prisoners were made; blinded with revenge, stung to madness by the remembrance of their grievous wrongs, the assailants rushed forward, sparing neither age nor sex; destruction seemed to have set all her dreadful instruments at once to work, and in a few days upwards of seventy thousand Romans perished by the gibbet, the fire, and the sword. Such of the Roman officers as could escape, fled to their galleys, and hurried off to Gaul. Even Suetonius, who had hastened back at the first rumour of this dreadful carnage, was compelled to abandon London, already a place of some distinction, in despair, and hurry off with his legions into the open provinces. As he retreated, the Britons entered; and out of the vast multitude which a few hours before those walls had inclosed, scarcely a soul remained alive. The Roman soldiers rushed into their temples to avoid the assailants; the figure of the goddess of Victory which they worshipped fell to the ground; the females ran wailing and shrieking into the streets, into the council chambers, into the theatres, with their children in their arms. In the red sunsets of the evening sky their heated imagination traced moving and blood-coloured phantoms, colonies in ruins, and overthrown temples, whose pillars were stained with human gore, and in the ridges which the receding tide left upon the shore, their fancies conjured up the carcasses of the dead. Before the desolating forces of the stern Boadicea ran Fear and Terror, with trembling steps and pale looks; by her side grim Destruction, and blood-dyed Carnage stalked, while behind marched Death, taking no note of Sorrow, and Grief, and Silence, whom he left together to mourn amid the solitude of those unpeopled ruins. Meantime, Suetonius, having strengthened his army to a force which now amounted

to upwards of ten thousand men, chose the most favourable position for his troops, where he awaited the arrival of the Britons to commence the battle. Nor had he to wait long; for, flushed with victory, and reeking fresh from the carnage, the assailants came up, with Boadicea, thundering in her war-chariot, at their head, and soon drew together in the order of battle. The Romans were now actuated by feelings of revenge.

With her long yellow hair unbound, and falling in clusters far below the golden chain which encircled her waist, her dark eyes flashing vengeance as she glanced angrily aside to where the Roman legions were drawn up in the distance, (an impenetrable mass, looking in their coats of mail like a wall of steel, bristling with swords and spears,) and with the curved crimson of her cruel lip haughtily upturned, Boadicea rose tall and queen-like from the war-chariot in which her weeping daughters were seated, and turning to the assembled tribes who hemmed her round with a forest of tall spears, she raised her hand to command silence; and when the busy murmur of subdued applause which acknowledged her bravery had died away, she bade them remember the wrongs they had to revenge, the weight of oppression which had so long bowed their necks to the dust; the sword, and fire, and famine, which had desolated their fair land; their sons and daughters carried off and doomed to all the miseries of slavery; their priests ruthlessly butchered at the foot of the altar; their ancient groves hewn to the ground by sacrilegious hands, and consumed by fire; she pointed to her daughters whom the invaders had violated, and raising her white and rounded arm, showed the marks which the scourge of the ruffianly Catus had left behind; then brandishing her spear aloft, she shook the loosened reins over her restive steeds, and was soon lost in the thickest of the battle. But the lapse of a century, and the many battles in which they had fought, had not yet enabled the Britons to stand firm before the shock of the Roman legions. They were defeated with tremendous slaughter; and the queen, who had so nobly revenged her country's wrongs, only escaped the carnage to perish by her own hand. Even down the dim vista of time we can yet perceive her; the flower of her army lying around dead; the remnant routed and pursued by the merciless Romans, while she, heartbroken, hopeless, and alone, sacrifices her own life; and though but a heathen, does a deed which in that barbarous

age would have ennobled her had she been born in the country of her civilized invaders, who would proudly have erected a statue to her memory in that city whose haughty emperors proclaimed themselves the conquerors of the world. Little did the vanquishers dream a woman would spring up and emulate the deeds of their most renowned warriors, and that the fair barbarian would in after ages leave behind her a more than Roman name.

But neither the destruction of the druids, the death of Boadicea, nor the destruction of her immense army, enabled the Romans to extend their possessions with safety in the island. They were ever, as in the days of Cæsar, upon the defensive; no colony, unless a legion of soldiers were encamped in the immediate neighbourhood, was safe; and even after defeating the queen of the Iceni, and receiving a great force of both infantry and cavalry, Suetonius left the island unconquered, and the war unfinished, and returned to Rome.

It is a pleasure to turn from these scenes of slaughter, to find that the next Roman general of note who came over to govern Britain, subdued more tribes by the arts of peace, and by kindness, than all his predecessors had done by the force of arms. Such is the power of genius, that we seem again to be in the company of one we have long known; for Agricola was the father-in-law of Tacitus, the eloquent historian, and there is but little doubt that the record of the few facts we are in possession of connected with this period were dictated by the general himself to his highly gifted son-in-law; we can almost in fancy see the grey-headed veteran and the author seated together in some Roman villa discoursing about these "deeds of other days." He had served under Suetonius, was present at that dreadful massacre in the island of Anglesey, where men, women, and children were so mercilessly butchered—had with his own eyes looked upon Boadicea. What would we not now give to know all that he had seen? To write this portion of our history with his eyes—to go on from page to page recording what he witnessed from day to day—to have him seated by our hearth now as he no doubt many a time sat beside Tacitus. What word-pictures would we then paint—what wild scenes would we portray!

It was Agricola who first taught the ancient Britons to erect better houses, to build walled cities instead of huts; who bestowed

praise upon their improvements, instructed them in the Roman language, and persuaded them to adopt a more civilized costume; to erect baths and temples; to improve their agriculture; and thus by degrees he so led them on from step to step, that instead of a race of rude barbarians, they began to assume the aspect of a more civilized nation. Still he had to contend with old and stubborn tribes, who held it a disgrace to adopt any other manners than those of their rude forefathers—the same difficulties beset the path of the Norman on a later day—the same obstacles are met with in Ireland at the present hour—pride, indolence, ignorance, and a host of other evils have first to be uprooted before the better seed can be sown. It would but be wearisome to follow the footsteps of the Roman general through all his campaigns; before him the imperial eagles were borne to the very foot of the Grampian hills; he erected forts for the better protection of the country he had conquered, and the huge rampart which ran from the Frith of Clyde to the Forth was begun under Agricola. He appears to have been the first of the Roman commanders who brought his legions in contact with the Caledonians, or men of the woods, and even there he met with a formidable opponent in the Caledonian chief named Galgacus; the same struggle for liberty was made there as in England—battles, bloodshed, death, and desolation are about all that history records of these campaigns, if we except what may be called a voyage of discovery; for it appears that the Roman general sailed round the coast of Scotland to the Land's End in Cornwall, and thence to the point from which he had first started—supposed to be Sandwich—being the first of the Roman generals who, from personal observation, discovered that Britain was an island. Shortly after completing this voyage Agricola was recalled to Rome. The next period of our history carries us to other conflicts, which took place before those mighty bulwarks that the Roman conquerors built up to keep back the northern invaders, who in their turn overran England with more success than the Romans had done before them. It was then a war between the Romans and the Picts and Scots, instead of, as before, between the Romans and the Britons. Although they doubtless originally descended from the same Celtic race, yet through the lapse of years, and their having lingered for some time in Ireland and in Gaul, we are entangled in so many doubts, that all we can clearly

comprehend is, that three different languages were spoken in the island of Britain at this period, namely, Welsh, Irish, and another; but whether the latter was Gothic or Pictish, learned men who have dedicated long years of study to the subject have not yet determined by what name it is to be distinguished.

CHAPTER VI.

DEPARTURE OF THE ROMANS.

“He looked and saw wide territory spread
Before him; towns and rural works between,
Cities of men, with lofty gates and towers,
Concourse in arms, fierce forces threatening war—
Assaulting: others, from the wall defend
With dart and javelin, stones and sulphurous fire:
On each hand slaughter and gigantic deeds.”

MILTON'S PARADISE LOST, BOOK XI.

THE fortified line erected by Agricola was soon broken through by the northern tribes, and the Emperor Adrian erected a much stronger barrier, though considerably within the former; and this extended from the Tyne to the Solway, crossing the whole breadth of that portion of the island. Urbicus, as if determined that the Romans should not lose an inch of territory which they had once possessed, restored the more northern boundary which Adrian had abandoned, and once more stretched the Roman frontier between the Friths of Clyde and Forth; they thus possessed two walls, the more northern one, first begun by Agricola, and the southern one, erected by Adrian. Forts were built at little more than a mile distant from each other along this line, and a broad rampart ran within the wall, by which troops could readily march from one part to another. This outer barrier was the scene where many a hard contest took place, and in the reign of Commodus it was again broken down, and the country ravaged up to the very foundations of the wall of Adrian. This skirmishing and besieging, building up and breaking down of barriers, lasted for nearly a century, during which period scarcely a single event transpired in Britain of suffi-

cient importance to be recorded, though there is every proof that the Britons were, in the meantime, making rapid strides in civilization; for England rested securely under the guardianship of the Roman arms. The battles fought at the northern barriers disturbed not the tranquillity of the southern parts of the island. It was not until the commencement of the third century, when old and gouty, and compelled to be borne at the head of his army in a litter, that the Emperor Severus determined to conquer the Caledonians, and boldly sallied out for that purpose beyond the northern frontier. His loss was enormous, and between war with the natives, and the wearisome labour in making roads, felling forests, and draining marshes, which had hitherto been impassable to the Roman troops, fifty thousand soldiers were sacrificed. Nothing daunted, however, the gouty old emperor still pressed onward, until he reached the Frith of Moray, and was struck with the difference in the length of the days, and shortness of the nights, compared with those in southern latitudes. Saving making a few new roads, and receiving the submission of the few tribes who chanced to lie in his way, he appears to have done nothing towards conquering this hardy race; so he returned to Newcastle, and began to build a stronger barrier than any of his predecessors had hitherto erected. On the northern side of this immense wall, he caused a deep ditch to be dug, about thirty-six feet wide, while the wall itself was twelve feet in height; thus, from the bottom of the ditch on the northern side, there rose a barrier about twenty-five feet high, which was also further strengthened by a large number of fortifications, and above three hundred turrets. But before Severus had well completed his gigantic labours, the Caledonians had again overleaped the more northern barrier, and fought their way up to the new trenches. The grey-headed old hero vowed vengeance, and swore by "Mars the Red," that he would spare neither age nor sex. Death, who is sometimes merciful, kindly stepped in, and instead of allowing him to swing in his litter towards new scenes of slaughter, cut short his contemplated campaign at York, about the year two hundred and eleven; and after his death, the northern barrier was again given up to the Caledonians.

A wearisome time must it have been to those old Roman legions, who had to keep guard on that long, monotonous wall, which went stretching for nearly seventy miles over hill and

valley; nothing but a desolate country to look over, or that wide, yawning, melancholy ditch to peep into from the battlements, or a beacon-fire to light on the top of the turret, as a signal that the barbarians were approaching. An occasional skirmish must have been a relief to that weary round of every-day life, made up in marches from fort to fort, where there was no variety, saving in a change of sentries—no relief excepting now and then sallying out for forage; for between the outer and inner wall, the whole country seems at this period to have been a wilderness—a silent field of death, in which the bones of many a brave man were left to bleach in the bleak wind, and from which only the croak of the raven and the howl of the wolf came upon the long dark midnights that settled down over those ancient battlements. Sometimes the bold barbarians sailed round the end of the wall in their wicker boats, covered with “black bull’s hide,” and landed within the Roman intrenchments, or spread consternation amongst the British villages; but with the exception of an occasional inroad like this, the whole of the northern part of the island appears to have been quiet for nearly another century, during which the Roman arms seem to have become weakened, and the British tribes to have given themselves up more to the arts of peace than of war. Such privileges as were granted to the Roman citizens, were also now extended to the Britons; and under the dominion of Caracalla, the successor of Severus, there is but little doubt that the southern islanders settled peaceably down in their homesteads (now comfortable abodes), and began to be somewhat more Romanized in their manners, that marriages took place between the Romans and the Britons, and that love and peace had now settled down side by side, in those very spots which the stormy spirits of Cassivellaunus, Caractacus, and Boadicea had formerly passed over. The wheels of the dreaded war-chariots seem to have rested on their axles; we scarcely meet with the record of a single revolt amongst the native tribes, excepting those beyond the wall of Adrian. Through the pages of Gildas we catch glimpses of strange miracles, and see the shadow of the cross falling over the old druidical altars, but nothing appears distinct; and although we may doubt many passages in the writings of this our earliest historian, it would be uncharitable to the memory of the dead even to entertain a thought that he wilfully falsified a single fact. The only marvel

is, that, living in an age when so few could write—when only common rumours were floating about him—when he was surrounded with the faint outlines of old traditions, he should have piled together so many facts which are borne out by contemporary history. To place no faith in the narrative of Gildas, is to throw overboard the writings of the venerable Bede, and float over the sea of time for many a long year, without a single record to guide us. Although we have confidence in many of these ancient chronicles of the undefended dead, we shall pass on to undisputed facts, founded upon their faint records; for we have scarcely any other light to guide us through these dark caverns, which the ever-working hand of slow-consuming Time hath hollowed out.

About the commencement of the fourth century, a new enemy made its appearance upon the British coast, and though it only at first flitted about from place to place like a shadow, it at last fixed itself firmly upon the soil, never again to be wholly obliterated. This was the Saxon—not at that period the only enemy which beside the Caledonians invaded Britain, for there were others—Scandinavian pirates, ever ready with their long ships to dart across the British channel upon our coast. These invaders were kept at bay for a time by a bold naval commander called Carausius, supposed himself originally to have been a pirate, and occasionally to have countenanced the inroads of the enemy; and on this account, or from the dreaded strength of his powerful fleet, a command was issued from Rome to put him to death. He, however, continued for some time to keep the mastery of the British Channel, defied Rome and all its powers, assumed the chief command over Britain, and was at last stabbed by the hand of his own confidential minister at York. Allectus, Constantine, Chlorus, and Constantine the Great, follow each other in succession, each doing their allotted work, then fading away into Egyptian darkness, scarcely leaving a record behind beyond their names; for the eyes of the Roman eagle were now beginning to wax dim, and a fading light was fast settling down upon the Eternal city, and gloomy and ominous shadows were ever seen flitting athwart the golden disc whose rounded glory had so long fallen unclouded upon the Imperial city. Even in Britain the wall of Severus had been broken through, a Roman general slain, and London itself pillaged by these hordes of barbarians. The plunderers were,

however, attacked by Theodosius, the spoils retaken, and the inhabitants, whom they were driving before them in chains, liberated. These assailants are supposed to have been mingled bodies of the Picts, Scots, and Saxons, and the addition of Saxonius was added to the name of Theodosius, in honour of this victory.

The Roman soldiers in Britain now began to elect their own generals, and to shake off their allegiance to the Emperor: one undoubted cause for so few legions being found in England at this period, and a proof that that once mighty arm had already grown too weak to strike any effective blow in the distant territories. Chief amongst those elected to this high rank in Britain stood Maximus, who might doubtless have obtained undisputed possession of the British Island, had not his ambition led him to grasp at that portion of the Roman empire which was in the possession of Gratian. To accomplish this, he crossed over to Gaul with nearly all his island force, thus leaving Britain almost defenceless, and at the mercy of the Picts, and Scots, and Saxons, who were ever on the look-out for plunder. He attained his object, and lost his life, having been betrayed and put to death by Theodosius the Great, under whose sway the eastern and western empire of Rome was again united. Alaric the Goth was now pouring his armed legions into Italy, and to meet this overwhelming force, Germany, and Gaul, and Britain were drained of their troops, and our island again left a prey to the old invaders, who no doubt reaped another rich harvest; for the Britons, no longer able to defend themselves against these numerous hordes of barbarians, were compelled to apply for assistance to Rome. Probably some time elapsed before the required aid was sent, for we cannot conceive that Stilicho would part with a single legion until after he had won the battle of Pollentia, and seen the routed army of Alaric in full retreat. Such was the penalty Britain paid for her progress in civilization,—the flower of her youth were carried off to fight and fall in foreign wars,—and when she most needed the powerful arms of her native sons to protect her, they were attacking the enemies of Rome in a distant land, and leaving their own island-home a prey to new invaders. Nor was this all: when the arms of Rome had grown too feeble to protect Britain,—when beside their own legions, the country had been drained of almost every available soldier—when in every way it was weakened, and

scarcely possessed the power to make any defence, it was deserted by the Romans, left almost prostrate at the feet of Pictish, Scottish, and Saxon hordes, either to sue for mercy on the best terms that could be obtained, or to perish, from its very helplessness. Alas! Rome could no longer defend herself, her glory had all but departed; and the Britons, who for about two centuries had never been allowed to defend themselves, and were now almost strangers to arms, were left to combat a force which many a time had driven back the Roman legions.

The few Roman troops that yet remained in Britain began to elect and depose their own commanders at pleasure. They first chose Marcus, allowed him to rule for a short period, then put him to death. Gratian was next elevated to power, bowed down to and obeyed for three or four months, then murdered. Their next choice fell upon Constantine, influenced, it is said, by his high-sounding name; and it almost appears, by his carrying over his forces to Gaul, as Maximus had done before him, and aiming at a wider stretch of territory, that he scarcely thought Britain worth reigning over. Numbers of the brave British youth were sacrificed to his ambition; and England seems at this time to have only been a great nursery for foreign wars. Gerontius, who appears to have been a British chief, now rose to some influence, and basely betrayed his countrymen by entering into a league with the Picts, and Scots, and Saxons, and no doubt sharing the plunder they took from the wretched Britons; he also appears to have carried an armed force out of the island, probably raised by means of the bargain he made with the barbarians; he was pursued into Spain by the troops of the Roman emperor, Honorius; fled into a house for shelter after the battle; it was set fire to, and he perished in the flames—a dreadful death, yet almost merited by such a traitorous act as, first selling his country to these northern robbers and pirates, carrying off those who were able to protect her, and then leaving his kindred a prey to the barbarians. The Britons, in their misery, again applied for help to Rome: Honorius could render none, so he sent them such a letter as a cold friend, wearied out by repeated applications, sometimes pens to a poor, broken-down bankrupt; he could do nothing for them, they must now assist themselves; he forgave them the allegiance they owed, but had not a soldier to spare. So were the Britons blessed with a liberty which was of no use to them;

they were left to shift for themselves, like an old slave, who, instead of being a help, becomes an encumbrance to his task-master, who, to get rid of him, "God blesses him," and turns him out a free man, with the privilege to beg, or starve, or perish, unless in his old helpless age he can provide for himself. Not that the Roman emperor was so unkind in himself; he would perhaps have assisted the Britons if he could; he was but one in a long chain of evils, and that the last, and least powerful, which, by disarming the Britons, and draining off all their strength to feed other channels, had reduced them to their present helpless state. True, they had now temples, and baths, and pillared porticoes, and splendid galleries, and mosaic pavements, and beautifully shaped earthen-vessels; had some knowledge of Roman literature, and, above all, Roman freedom. Alas! alas! their old forest fortresses, and neglected war-chariots, and rude huts, guarded by the dangerous morass, and quaking bog, would now have stood them in better stead; their splendid mansions were but temptations to the barbarians, their broad, firm roads so many open doors to the robbers. They may not inaptly be compared to some poor family, left in a large and splendid mansion in some dangerous neighbourhood, which the owner has deserted, with all his retinue and wealth, for fear of the thieves and murderers who were ever assailing him, leaving only behind a book or two for their amusement, a few useless statues to gaze upon, and but little beside great gaping galleries, whose very echoes were alarming to the new possessors. Sir Walter Scott has beautifully said, when speaking of the Romans leaving the Britons in this defenceless state, that "Their parting exhortation to them to stand in their own defence, and their affectation of having, by abandoning the island, restored them to freedom, were as cruel as it would be to dismiss a domesticated bird or animal to shift for itself, after having been from its birth fed and supplied by the hand of man."* Strange retribution, that whilst the sun of Rome should from this period sink never to rise again in its former glory, that of Britain should slowly emerge from the storm and clouds which threatened nothing but future darkness, and burst at last into a golden blaze, whose brightness now gilds the remotest regions of the earth.

* History of Scotland, vol. i. p. 9.

But Britain had still a few sons left, worthy of the names which their brave forefathers bore; the blood of Boadicea still flowed in their veins; it might have been thinned by the luxury of the Roman bath, and deadened by long inactivity, but though it only ran sluggishly, it was still the same as had roused the strong hearts of Cassivellaunus and Caractacus when the Roman trumpets brayed defiance at the gates of their forest cities. There was still liberty or death left to struggle for; the Roman freedom they threw down in disdain, and trampled upon the solemn mockery; and when they once cast off this poisoned garment, they arose like men inspired with a new life; they seemed to look about as if suddenly aroused from some despairing dream—as if astonished to hear their old island waves rolling upon a beach unploughed by the keel of a Roman galley — as if wondering that they had not before broken through those circumscribed lines, and forts, and ramparts, while they were yet guarded with the few Roman sentinels; they saw the sunshine streaming upon their broad meadows, and old forests, and green hills, and tall pale-faced cliffs, turning to gold every ripple that came from afar to embrace the sparkling sands of the white beach, and they felt that such a beautiful country was never intended to become the home of slaves. They shed a few natural tears when they remembered how many of their sons and daughters had been borne over those billows in the gilded galleys of the invaders; they recalled the faces they had seen depart for ever over the lessening waves; the mother weeping over her son; the manacled father, whose “eyes burnt and throbbed, but had no tears;” the pale-cheeked British maidens, who sat with their faces buried in their hands, as, amid the distant sound of Roman music, their lovers were hurried away to leave their bones bleaching upon some foreign shore; and they would have fallen down and prostrated themselves upon the ground for very sorrow, had not the thunder of their northern invaders rung with a startling sound upon their ears, and they felt thankful that much work yet remained to be done, and that they were now left to fight their own battles, even as their forefathers had fought, in the dearly remembered days of their ancient glory.

With a population so thinned as it must have been by the heavy drainage made from time to time from the flower of its youth, we can readily conceive how difficult it was to defend the wall which

Severus had erected, after the departure of the Romans. But we cannot imagine that the Britons would hesitate to abandon a position which they could no longer maintain, or waste their strength at an outer barrier when the enemy had already marched far into the country. On this point the venerable Gildas must have been misinformed, and the narrative of Zosimus is, beyond doubt, the correct one. From his history it is evident that the Britons rose up and boldly defended themselves from the northern invaders; they also deposed the Roman rulers that still lingered in the British cities, and who, no longer overawed by the dictates of the emperor, doubtless hoped to establish themselves as kings, or chiefs, amongst the different tribes they had so long held in thrall. But the Britons threw off this foreign yoke, and at last rooted out all that remained of the power of Rome. Thus, beside the Picts and Scots, who were ever pouring in their ravaging hordes from the north, and the Saxons, who came with almost every favourable breeze which blew, to the British shore, there was an old and stubborn foe to uproot, and one which had for above four centuries retained a tenacious hold of our island soil. Many of the Romans who remained were in possession of splendid mansions, and large estates, and as the imperial city was now over-run with bands of barbarians, they were loath to leave a land abounding with plenty, for a country then shaken to its very centre by the thunder of war. Though not clearly stated, there is strong reason for believing that these very Romans, who were so reluctant to quit Britain, connived at the ravages of the Picts and Scots, as if hoping, by their aid, once more to establish themselves in the island.

This was a terrible time for the struggling Britons—it was no longer a war in which offers of peace were made, and hostages received, but a contest between two powers, for the very soil on which they trod. This the islanders knew, and though often sorely depressed and hardly driven, they still continued to look the storm in the face. Every man had now his own household to fight for—the Roman party was led on by Aurelius Ambrosius, the British headed by Vortigern; a name which they long remembered and detested, for the misery it brought into the land. As for Rome, she had no longer leisure to turn her eye upon the distant struggle, for Attila and his Goths were now baying at her heels; there was a cry of wailing and lamentation in her towered streets, and the

wide landscape which stretched at her imperial feet, was blackened by the fire of the destroyer. She had no time, either to look on or send assistance to either party; and when Ætius had read the petition sent by the Britons, who complained that "the barbarians chase us into the sea; the sea throws us back upon the barbarians; and we have only the hard choice left us of perishing by the sword or by the waves," he doubtless cast it aside, and exclaimed, "I also am beset by a host of enemies, and cannot help you:" a grim smile, perhaps, for a moment lighting up his features, as he recalled the Romans who, false to their country, had basely lingered in the British island, and thus deserted him in the hour of need; and as the stern shadow again settled down upon his features, he consoled himself for a moment by thinking that they also had met with their reward—then again prepared to defend himself against the overwhelming force of Attila.

Harassed on all sides, the Britons now began to look to other quarters for aid, for they appear to have assembled at last under one head, and to have been guided in their course by Vortigern. The character of this ancient British king is placed in so many various lights by the historians who have recorded the events of this obscure period, that it is impossible to get at the truth. What he did, is tolerably clear; nor are we altogether justified in ascribing his motives only to self advancement; pressed within and without by powerful enemies, he, no doubt, sought assistance from the strongest side, though it is not evident that he ever made any formal offer. He must have had some acquaintance with the Saxons, whom he enlisted in his cause—it is improbable that he would hail an enemy, standing out at sea with his ships—invite him to land and attack a foe, with whom this very stranger had been leagued. One man might have done so, but what Vortigern did had, doubtless, the sanction of the British chiefs who were assembled around him at the time. They must have had strong faith in the Saxons, and it is not improbable that some of them had been allowed to settle in the Isle of Thanet—had already aided the Britons in their wars against the Romans, who were located in the island, as well as against their northern invaders, before they were intrusted with the defence of Britain. But we must first glance at the England of that day before we introduce our Saxon ancestors—the "grey forefathers" of our

native land, whose very language outlived that of their Norman conquerors, and who blotted out almost every trace of the ancient Britons by their power—"A tribe which, in the days of Ptolemy," says Sharon Turner, in his admirable history of the Anglo-Saxons, "just darkened the neck of the peninsula of Jutland, and three inconsiderable islands in its neighbourhood. One of the obscure tribes whom Providence selected, and trained to form the nobler nations of France, Germany, and England, and who have accomplished their distinguished destiny." These stand dimly arrayed upon the distant shore of time, and calmly await our coming.

CHAPTER VII.

BRITAIN AFTER THE ROMAN PERIOD.

What, though those golden eagles of the sun
Have gone for ever, and we are alone,
Shall we sit here and mourn? No! look around,
There still are in the sky trails of their glory,
And in the clouds traces where they have been.—
Their wings no longer shadow us with fear.
Let us then soar, and from this grovelling state
Rise up, and be what they have never been.

ODE TO HOPE.

BRITAIN, after the departure of the Romans, was no longer a country covered every way with wild waving woods, dangerous bogs, and vast wastes of reedy and unprofitable marshes. Smooth green pastures, where flocks and herds lowed and bleated, and long slips of corn waved in the summer sunshine, and fruit-trees which in spring were hung with white and crimson blossoms, and whose branches in autumn bowed beneath the weight of heavy fruitage, now swelled above the swampy waste, and gave a cheerful look to the grassy glade which had made room for the bright sunshine to enter into the very heart of those gloomy old forests. Walled towns, also, heaved up above the landscape, and great broad brown roads went stretching for miles through a country over which, a few centuries before, a mounted horseman would have foundered. The dreamy silence which once reigned for weary miles over the lone-

some woodland, was now broken by the hum of human voices; and the ancient oaks, which for many a silent year had only overshadowed the lairs of beasts of the chase, now overhung pleasant footpaths, or stretched along the sides of well-frequented roads, sure guides to the lonely wayfarer that he could no longer mistake his course from town to town. Though many a broad bog, and long league of wood and wilderness still lay on either hand, yet, every here and there, the home of man rose up amid the waste, showing that the stir of life had begun to break the sleep of those solitudes. Instead of the shadowy avenue of trees which marked the entrance to their forest fortresses, lofty arches now spanned the roads which opened into their walled streets, and above the roofs of their houses tall temples towered in all the richness of Roman architecture, dedicated to the classical gods and goddesses whose sculptured forms graced the lofty domes of the imperial city. Few and far between, in the dim groves, whose silent shadows remained undisturbed, the tall grass climbed and drooped about the neglected altar of the druids, and on the huge stone where the holy fire once burned, the grey lichen and the green moss now grew. Even the Roman sentinel, as he paced to and fro behind the lofty battlement, sometimes halted in the midst of his measured march, and leaned on his spear to listen to the low "Hallelujah" which came floating with faint sound upon the air, as if fearful of awakening the spirit of some angry idolator. In the stars which pave the blue floor of heaven, men began to trace the form of the cross, and to see the spirit of the dove in the white moonlight that threw its silver upon the face of the waters, for Britain already numbered amongst her slaughtered sons those who had suffered martyrdom for the love they bore to their crucified Redeemer. Under the shadow of the Roman eagles had marched soldiers, proud that they bore on their hearts the image of the cross of Christ. In spite of the decree of Diocletian, the Gospel sound still spread, and around the bleeding head of the British martyr St. Alban, there shone a glory which eclipsed all the ancient splendour of Rome. The mountains, the rivers, and the ancient oaks, were soon to echo back the worship of the true God, and no longer to remain the objects of idolatry. The unholy doctrine of the druids was ere long to be unmasked, and instead of the gloomy gods which frowned down in stone amid the darksome groves, and whose dead eyes ever looked upon the

melancholy water that murmured around the altars on which they stood, the light of a benign countenance was about to break in beauty over the British isle, and a voice to be heard, proclaiming peace and good-will to all mankind. For the Picts and Scots had already fallen back affrighted before the holy Hymns of Zion, and been more startled by the loud Hallelujah chaunted by the soldiers of Christ, who were led on by Germanus, than ever they were by the loud braying of the brazen trumpets of Rome. British ladies, ever foremost to tread the paths of religion and virtue, had boldly heralded the way, and in spite of the lowering and forbidding looks of the druids, Græcina and Claudia had already knelt before the throne of the True God. Though the vanguard came heavily up amid cloud and storm, Hope, and Love, and Mercy, rode fearlessly upon the wings of the tempest.

It is but just to the memory of those ancient Roman invaders, that we should confess they never reduced to slavery and total subjection the tribes which they conquered; that, generally, in return for the taxes they imposed, and the expense to which they put the invaded country, they instructed the inhabitants in the Roman arts—and although they humbled their martial spirit, and left the conquered tribes less able to defend themselves, still the signs of civilization everywhere marked their course. Beside being brave generals, the Roman commanders were also able statesmen; nor had the Britons for centuries before, nor did they for centuries after, sleep in that peaceful security which they enjoyed under the sway of the wise Agricola. Though the conquerors taxed their corn, they taught the Britons a better method of cultivating it; though they made heavy levies upon their cattle, they were the first to set them the example of reclaiming many an acre of pasturage from the hitherto useless marsh and forest. They instructed them in planting the fruit-trees, from which the tithe was taken; and, in addition to orchards, pointed out to them the art of dressing vineyards. Fifteen hundred years or more may have chilled our climate, but in those days the purple and bunchy grape drooped around many a British homestead. The chief towns were governed by Roman laws; London and Verulamium were already celebrated cities, and the latter reared high its lofty towers, and temples, and theatres, in all the architectural grandeur of Roman art. For centuries after did many of these majestic monu-

ments remain, even when the skeleton of the once mighty Rome had all but crumbled into dust, as if to proclaim that the last work of those all-dreaded conquerors was the civilization of Britain. They divided our island into five provinces, appointed governors and officers to administer justice, and collect taxes in each division. Over all these a chief ruler was placed, who was accountable for his actions to the Roman emperor, and whose written orders were given to him in a green-covered book, emblazoned with golden castles, when he was installed in the dignity of his office—as, in almost all colonies, there were doubtless many who, “clothed in authority,” ruled with an iron hand over their fellow-men; not that such always escaped—for, as we have before stated, the revolt of Boadicea was caused by the oppression of Roman rulers, and dreadful was the reckoning of her vengeance.

We have already had occasion to remark how easily the Romans broke through the ancient British fortresses, and how frequently the Picts and Scots made inroads through the ramparts erected by the Romans. Saving, however, in such works as appear to have been hastily thrown up by the Britons, when they retreated into their native forests, they displayed considerable skill in the erection of their strongholds. They occasionally constructed high walls, with blocks of granite five or six feet long, and these they piled together without the aid of cement, digging a deep ditch outside, to make access more difficult; and as this fortress was built in the form of a circle, and the wall was of sufficient thickness to permit half a dozen men to walk on it abreast, it must, although not of such extent, have been as difficult to storm as the barriers thrown up by the Romans. The huge stone, supposed to weigh upwards of seven hundred tons, which is placed on the points of two rocks in Cornwall, and the massy blocks raised and piled on each other at Stonehenge, show that, ages before the Roman invasion, Britain was inhabited by a tribe whose knowledge of the power of leverage, and skill in removing such gigantic blocks from the distant quarries, were only surpassed by the builders of the Egyptian Pyramids. No wonder that a race possessed of such natural genius was, under tuition of the Roman architects, enabled to produce such a class of workmen, that a demand was made for them even in Gaul, and that the skill of the British mechanic was in that early age acknowledged on the continent.

Industry led to wealth, and the latter to luxuries to which the simple Britons had, before the Roman period, been entire strangers ; instead of the cloak of skin, and the dyed sagum, those who dwelt in towns now wore the Roman toga, and the British ladies began to decorate themselves with jewels of gold, silver, and precious stones, instead of their own island pearls, once so celebrated as to cause even a grave historian to attribute the invasion of Julius Cæsar to no other motive than a wish to fill his galley with them. They now wore bracelets and collars of gold, and amongst the imports to Britain, we find mention of ivory bridles, chains of gold, cups of amber, and drinking-vessels of glass, made in the most elegant forms. A great change had taken place in the habits of these ancient indwellers of the forest, whose eyes in former days had seldom been gladdened by a sight of such treasures, unless when brought, now and then, by some warrior from the Gaulish wars, to be looked on and wondered at, or caught sight of for a moment amongst the coveted hoards of the druids. We have it on record, that the waist of queen Boadicea was encircled by a chain, or girdle of gold ; and shortly after we have proof that nearly the whole of the British tribes were in subjection under the Roman power—clear evidence that wealth, refinement, and civilization had softened down the rugged and hardy sinews of war—that the old warriors of the wild woods were better adapted for the struggles of battle than their sons who had put on the Roman toga, and reared their homes within the limits of walled cities. As it was with the Britons, so it was with the Saxons—they also became less courageous, as they grew more civilized. And here a grave question naturally intrudes itself into our narrative, which to answer aright must either yield in favour of a state of barbarism, or pull down that great idol called a hero—though there are many exceptions on record to uphold the latter, some of which we have already instanced, as in Cassivellanus and Caractacus.

It is apparent that the more southern inhabitants of the British island had by this time adopted the Roman custom of interring their dead. Formerly the northern tribes did but little more than place the body in the naked earth, cover it up, and mark the spot by a pile of stones; and that rude monument was left to point out the last resting-place of the departed. The more southern tribes erected huge barrows above their dead,

burying with them all that was considered most valuable, articles of gold and silver, weapons used in the war and in the chase, and even the body of the favourite dog, when he died, was not considered unworthy of sharing his master's grave. Many of these mounds of earth were immense, and in several cases it is clear that the soil which formed them had been brought from a considerable distance, perhaps from the very spot which had been marked by the valorous though now forgotten deeds of the dead. These ancient sepulchres varied greatly in size and shape. Those which appear to have contained the remains of the earlier inhabitants of our island, were frequently above a hundred yards in length; and if, as it has been supposed, each follower brought his wicker basket of earth to empty upon the chieftain's grave, or the high-piled hillock was the work of the friends of the departed, though so many long centuries have elapsed, they yet speak of the respect in which those early warriors were held. Sometimes the body was placed in a cist, with the legs drawn back towards the head, and this position of burying seems to have been adopted at a very remote period by the Britons. Sometimes the trunk of a large tree was cut up into a proportionate length, hewn hollow, and the body placed within it. This again appears to have been a custom of very ancient date. They were also in the habit of burning the bodies of the dead—of collecting the burnt bones and placing them in the lowest bed of the barrow, then piling the stupendous mound above the ashes. Those tribes that became more Romanised appear to have followed the custom of their conquerors of burning the bodies, and collecting the ashes in urns; many of these have been discovered in what are called the Roman-British barrows, which display but indifferent workmanship. Others which have been dug out of old Roman burying-places show much elegance both in their forms and ornaments. With these have also been found mingled incense and drinking cups of the most beautiful patterns. The Britons appear to have had no common grave-yard; one barrow seems to have covered the remains of a chief, another that of his wife and children; perchance those who fell in the same battle were sometimes interred together, or it may be that the lesser hillocks covered the remains of the vassals, hemming around the huge barrow under which the chieftain slept, as if to protect him even in death—a silent guard surrounding his remains, as when living they had rallied about him. What were the forms of their

solemn processions—what ceremonies they used while burying their dead—what heathen prayers they offered up to their rude gods, or what war-hymns they chaunted over the remains of their chiefs, we know not. The snows of nearly two thousand winters have fallen, whitened, and melted upon, their graves, but whether the latter were interred amid the deep war-cry of the tribe, or consigned to the earth amid tears and sorrowful sounds, we can never know. The glass beads, the amulets, and breast-plates of gold—the spear-heads of bronze and flint, the rude necklaces of shells, and the pins and ornaments which we have discovered, throw no light upon the name, rank, or history of the dead.

The barbarous custom of painting or tatooing their skins soon grew into disfavour as the Britons became civilized. They began to find other uses for the dye which they extracted from the herb called woad, and instead of distinguishing themselves by the hideous forms of beasts or reptiles which they were wont to puncture and imprint upon their bodies, they now bore the marks of their rank in the form of their costume, and sought for their renown in the plaudits of other men. They began to look for their leaders amongst the ancient families, and to trace back their genealogies to their earliest heroes. This ended all Roman claims, for they refused to grant any land to such as had not descended from the primitive tribes; it led also to much dissension, to many heart-burnings and bitter jealousies; family was divided against family, and tribe against tribe; petty kings sprang up in every province; there was much blood shed—more to be spilt; and as Vortigern alone had maintained his claim, he was determined to support his position at any sacrifice. Whether Hengist and Horsa came on a mission of peace, or as traders or pirates, or were driven by a storm upon the coast, or were exiled from their country, are matters of no moment. They were hired—their business was to fight—they were paid for doing so—they accepted the terms offered by the British king, acquitted themselves manfully, and finally were the means of establishing the Saxons in Britain. To the commencement of this period we have now arrived, and the next who pass through the gate of history are our old English forefathers, the Saxons.

The Saxon Invasion.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANCIENT SAXONS.

The stupendously holy gods considered these things:
 They gave names to the night and to the twilight;
 They called the morning and mid-day so.
 There sat an old man towards the east in a wood of iron,
 Where he nourished the sons of Fenris.
 Every one of these grew up prodigious—a giant form,—
 The sons of the two brothers inhabit the vast mansions of the winds.
 A hall stands brighter than the sun,
 Covered with gold in Gimle.—THE VOLUPSA.

THE Saxons were a German or Gothic race, possessing an entirely different language to that of the Celts or ancient Britons; and although they do not appear to have attracted the same attention as the other tribes, they were, doubtless, settled at a very early period in Europe. At the time when they begin to stand forth so prominently in the pages of history, they occupied the peninsula of Jutland, now a portion of Denmark, with two or three neighbouring islands, known by the names of North Strande, Busen, and Heligoland, all situate near the mouth of the Elbe. As they, however, consisted of three tribes—namely, the Jutes, the Angles, and the Saxons—they probably, at a former period, stretched over a much larger surface of country, the boundaries of which it is now difficult to define. As early as the time of Ptolemy, a branch of this ancient Scythian race was denominated the Saxons. They claimed their descent from Odin, probably some old and celebrated warrior, whose deeds grew up under magnified traditions, until at last he was dignified with the title of their god. Like the Britons, they were a brave and fearless race, delighting in plunder and slaughter, ever choosing the most dangerous and perilous paths, loving the roll of the wave, and the roar of the storm, and gene-

rally landing under a gloomy and tempestuous sky, to surprise and attack the enemy. Their arms were a sharp sword, a keen-pointed dagger, a tall spear, and a ponderous battle-axe, all made of good iron. But the most dreaded weapon they wielded seems to have been a large heavy hammer, from which projected a number of sharp-pointed spikes. This fearful instrument was the terror of their enemies, and no helmet was proof against its blows. Their chiefs wore a kind of scaly armour, which appears to have been formed of iron rings, locked together upon a tight-fitting coat, or leathern doublet. The rims and bosses of their shields were of iron, while the body was sometimes formed of wood, and covered with leather. Many of these shields were large enough to protect the whole form, and as they were convex, no doubt the point of the enemy's weapon would glide off, unless it was struck firmly into the centre; thus they formed a kind of moveable bulwark, behind which the warrior sheltered himself in battle. They believed that the souls of those who bravely perished on the hard-fought field were at once wafted into the halls of Valhalla, and the terrible heaven which they pictured in a future state consisted in those dreadful delights so congenial to their brutal natures while on earth—being made up of a succession of conflicts and struggles, cleaving of helmets and hacking of limbs; and that when the twilight deepened over those awful halls, every warrior was again healed of his wounds; that they then sat down to their grim and hideous banquet, where they fed upon a great boar, whose flesh never diminished, however much they ate, and when they had satiated themselves with these savoury morsels, which they cut off with their daggers, they washed them down with deep draughts of mead, which they drank out of the skulls of their cowardly enemies. Into those halls the brave alone were admitted—the craven, and the coward, and those who fell not in the red and reeking ranks of battle, were doomed to dwell in the dark regions of Niflheim, where Hela, the terrible, reigned; where gaunt Famine stalked like a shadow beneath the vaulted dome; where Anguish ever writhed upon her hard bed, and dark Delay kept watch against the sombre doors which she never opened. Such were the eternal abodes those barbarians believed they should enter after death—the realms which their stormy spirits would soar into, when they could no longer guide their barks over the shadows of the overhanging rocks—when the tempestuous sea no longer

bore them upon the thunder of its billows, and cast them upon some distant coast, to revel in carnage and slaughter;—it was then that they turned their dying eyes to the coveted halls of Valhalla, and that huge banquet-table on which the grisly boar lay stretched, surrounded by drinking-cups formed of human skulls.

Those who had not courage enough to win an entrance into these envied realms by their own bravery, put one of their slaves to death, considering that such a sacrifice was acceptable to Odin, and a sure passport into this ideal world. They, however, believed that Valhalla would at last pass away; Odin himself perish; that the good and the brave would inhabit another heaven, called Gimle; and the evil and the cowardly be consigned to a more awful place of punishment than that over which Hela reigned; that the gods would sit in judgment; that Surtur, the black one, would appear; and an evil spirit be liberated from the dark cave in which he had been for ages bound with chains of iron. That for three years increasing snow would fall from all quarters of the world, and during this long winter there would be no interim of summer, neither would any green thing grow, but all mankind would perish by each other's hands. That two huge monsters would appear; one of which would devour the sun, the other, the moon; that mountains and trees would be torn up, and the earth shaken to its deepest foundations. That the stars would be blotted out of heaven, and one wide shoreless sea cover the whole world, over which a solitary ship would float, built of the nails of dead men, and steered by the tall giant Hrymer. Then would the huge wolf Fenris open his enormous mouth, the lower jaw of which would touch the earth, the upper the heaven, over which a serpent would breathe poison, while the sons of Muspell rode forward, led by the black Surtur. A blazing fire, spreading out its myriad tongues of flame, would burn before and behind him; his sword would glitter like the sun, and the bridge which spanned across heaven, be broken. Towards a large plain would these terrible forces move, followed by Fenris, the wolf. The brazen trumpet of Heimdal would ring out such a startling peal, as would awaken the gods, and cause the mighty ash of Ygdrasil to tremble. Odin would put on his golden helmet, and all the gods rise up in arms, and after the wolf had devoured him, and its jaws had been rent asunder by Vidar, the whole universe would be destroyed.

Such a creed as this was calculated to nourish and keep alive the most benighted superstitions amongst its believers. Thus we find them drawing omens from the flight and singing of birds, placing their trust in good and evil days, and considering the full or new moon as the most favourable seasons in which to put into operation any important plan. They were influenced by the moving of the clouds, and directed by the course of the winds; and from the entrails of the victims sacrificed, they drew their auguries. The breastplates they wore were imperfect, unless the smith who forged them muttered a charm while he wielded his ponderous hammer. Even the graves of dead men were frequented, and those who slept their last sleep were intreated to answer them. They judged of the fate of a battle by seizing an enemy, and compelling him to fight with one of their own race. From the branches of the oak they cut short twigs, marked them, then scattered them at random upon a white garment, and while the priest looked upward, he took those on which his hand chanced to alight, and if they proved to be those on which the favourite mark was impressed, it was considered a good omen. They rode out the perilous tempest on the deep with better heart if, on the departure of their bark from the stormy beach, some priestess, with her hair blown back, stood upon the giddy headland, and chaunted the mystic rhyme which they believed would waft them, more safely than the most favourable breeze, to the distant shore. Even through the long night of time we can picture her standing upon the dizzy edge of the rock, while the white-winged sea-gull wheeled and screamed above her head; with the subdued thunder of the hoarse waves ever rolling at her feet—her drapery blown aside, and her wan thin lips moving; while they, tugging at the long oar with their brawny arms and bowed heads, sent up a silent prayer to the god of the storm.

Such were our forefathers—men who would startle at the stirring of a leaf, or the shooting of a star, yet brave enough to rush upon the point of a spear with a flushed cheek and a bright eye, and who could look death full in the face without a feeling of fear. Nor would it be difficult to point out, even in our own day, numbers of superstitious signs and omens, which are as implicitly believed in by the peasantry of the present age, as they were by the ancient Saxons during this dark period of our history. The chattering of a magpie, the croaking of a raven, the howling

of a dog in the night, a winding-sheet in the candle, or a hollow cinder leaping out of the fire upon the hearth, are even now held amongst our superstitious countrymen as ominous of ill-luck, sickness, or death. Scarcely an obscure English province is without its wise-man, or cunning fortune-teller, those lingering remains of the Wicca of the Saxons, which have descended to us through the long lapse of nearly two thousand years, in spite of the burnings and other executions which were so common in our country only two or three centuries ago, when not to believe in witchcraft would have been held a crime equal to Atheism, by our more enlightened and comparatively modern forefathers.

The temple erected to their war-god, in their own country, appears to have been spacious and magnificent. On the top of a marble column stood this idol, in the figure of a tall, armed warrior, bearing a banner in his right hand, on which a red rose was emblazoned, while in his left he held a balance. His helmet was surmounted with a cock; on his breastplate a bear was engraved, while on the shield which was suspended from his shoulder was the image of a lion, upon a ground of flowers. Here, women divined, and men sacrificed, and into the battle was this warlike image borne by the priest; for as they could not trust themselves upon the sea without a charm being first muttered, so in the field did they require the image of their idol to countenance the contest. To this grim deity did they offer up their captives, and even those of their own tribe who had fled, and turned their backs upon the fight, for they looked upon cowardice as the greatest of crimes amongst their men, and wantonness in their women they punished with death.

Some of their idols are surrounded by a wild poetry, and an air of almost classic beauty, recalling to the mind the divinities worshipped by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Of such was their goddess, called the Mother of Earth, who was held so sacred, that only the priest was permitted to touch her. Her temple stood amid the solemn shadows of a silent grove; her figure was always covered by a white garment, which was washed in a secret lake; in those waters the slaves who administered at her shrine were drowned—no one, saving the priest, was allowed to go abroad, who were once entrusted with her mysteries. On holy days her image was borne in procession, on the backs of beautifully marked cows. Nothing but joy and peace then

reigned throughout the whole length and breadth of the land: the bark was moored upon the beach; the spear and battle-axe hung upon the beam above the hearth, and Odin himself seemed to sleep. But this lasted no longer than the days allotted to these processions: when they had passed, the keel was again launched, the weapons taken from their resting-place, while "grim-visaged war resumed his wrinkled front." Even the cattle that fed upon the island where this temple stood were held so sacred, that it was a crime to touch them, and he who drew water from the fountain that flowed beside the grove, dared not, even by a whisper, disturb the surrounding silence. We might almost fancy, while reading the description of the idol they named Crodus, that we saw before us the embodiment of one of Spenser's beautiful stanzas, or that he himself had but turned into verse some old record, in which he found pictured this image of one of the ancient Saxon gods. It was of the figure of an old man, stooping through very age: he was clothed in a white garment; a girdle of linen, the ends of which hung loose, encircled his waist; his head was grey, and bare. He held in his right hand a vessel, in which flowers floated in water; his left hand rested upon a wheel, while he stood with his naked feet upon the back of a prickly perch. How like Spenser's description is the above, of his "Old January wrapped well in many weeds, to keep the cold away—of February, with the old waggon-wheels and fish—of the hand cold through holding all the day the hatchet keen." Such a resemblance would the eye of a poet trace, and so would he transform old Crodus, the Saxon idol, into the personification of one of his months.

Whoever broke into one of their temples, and stole the sacred vessels, was punished with a slow, lingering, and terrible death. To the very edge of the sands of the sea-shore was he dragged, when the tide was low, and there made fast—his ears were cut off, and other parts of his body mutilated—then he was left alone. Wave after wave came and went, and washed around him, as the tide came in; he felt the sea rising every minute, inch by inch—higher still, higher it came—every ripple that made a murmur on the shore rang his death-knell, until the last wave came that washed over him—then vengeance was satisfied. A more awful death can scarcely be imagined.

They were a tall, big-boned, blue-eyed race of men, and it appears from an old law made to punish a man who seized

another by the hair, that they at one period wore it so long as to fall upon the shoulders. The females wore ornaments on their arms and necks. The government was generally vested in the hands of the aged, and they appear to have elected their ruler in war by the chiefs assembling and drawing lots. He on whom it fell, they followed and obeyed; but when the war was over, they were again all equal. They were divided into four orders—the Etheling, or noble, who never married below his own rank; the Free-man, who shared in the offices of government; the Freed-man, or he who, either by purchase or merit, had obtained his liberty; and the Serf, or slave. They reckoned their time by the number of nights, and counted their years by the winters. April they named Easter-month, after their goddess, Eostre. Thus we still retain a name which, though commemorating the worship of an ancient idol, has now become endeared to us by the Resurrection of Christ—a holy time which we can never forget, for at every return it seems to bring back a spirit of beauty into the world, whose pathway is strewn with the sweetest and earliest flowers of spring. Bright spots of light every way break through this age of barbarism, and May, which again hangs the snow-white blossoms upon the hawthorn, they called milk-month; nor can we now repeat the name without images of lowing cattle and pleasant pastures springing up before us, and we marvel how so warlike a race ever came to make use of such poetical and pastoral names. The sun they worshipped as a goddess; the moon as a god. A Saxon poet would have called the former, “The golden lady of the day.”

Although they appear to have been ignorant of the use of letters, yet there is but little doubt that they used certain signs, or characters, which they were able to interpret. Some of these Runic hieroglyphics seem to have been engraven upon their swords. Their war-songs were committed to memory, and it is probable that many a one ranked high amongst their minstrels, who possessed no other talent than that of remembering and repeating these ancient lays. It might be that they were just enabled to form characters clear enough in their resemblance to some natural object, which, when inscribed upon the rugged monumental stone, bore some allusion to the name or bravery of the chief whose memory it perpetuated. Their only books seem to have been the bark of trees; the rind of the beech their favourite register; a tablet on which the rustic chronicler of the present

day still makes the mark of his fair one's name, in characters only legible to himself. In point of civilization, they were at this time centuries behind the Britons, and an old author, describing them about the fifth century, says, "You see amongst them as many piratical leaders as you behold rowers, for they all command, obey, teach, and learn the art of pillage. Hence, after your greatest caution, still greater care is requisite. This enemy is fiercer than any other; if you be unguarded, they attack; if prepared, they elude you. They despise the opposing, and destroy the unwary; if they pursue, they overtake; if they fly, they escape. Shipwrecks discipline them, not deter; they do not merely know, they are familiar with, all the dangers of the sea; a tempest gives them security and success, for it divests the meditated land of the apprehension of a descent. In the midst of waves and threatening rocks they rejoice at their peril, because they hope to surprise." "Dispersed into many bodies," adds Zosimus, "they plundered by night, and when day appeared, they concealed themselves in the woods, feasting on the booty they had gained."*

When the Saxons first approached the British coast, they issued out from the mouth of the Elbe, in wicker boats covered with leather, which seem to have been but little better than the coracles used by the ancient Britons. These were so light, that they found but little difficulty in carrying them overland, from one river or creek to another, then paddling their way under cover of the banks, wherever sufficient water was to be found, until at last they came unaware upon the natives. The chiules or keels which they possessed at the time they were called upon to aid Vortigern, were capable of containing above a hundred men each, a wonderful improvement on the frail barks with which they first ventured into the British seas. Such as we have here described them, were the tribe destined to overthrow an ancient race, whom the Romans never wholly subjugated.

* Turner's "Anglo-Saxons," to which I am indebted for many of the facts recorded in this chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

HENGIST—HORSA—ROWENA AND VORTIGERN.

“They bargained for Thanet with Hengist and Horsa,
 Their aggrandizement was to us disgraceful,
 After the destroying secret with the slaves at the confluent stream,
 Conceive the intoxication at the great banquet of Mead,
 Conceive the deaths in the great hour of necessity;
 Conceive the fierce wounds—the tears of the women—
 The grief that was excited by the weak chief (Vortigern);
 Conceive the sadness that will be revolving to us,
 When the brawlers of Thanet shall be our princes.”

ANCIENT WELSH POEM—SEVENTH CENTURY.

WE have no account of the preliminary arrangements between the British king, and the Saxon chiefs, when the latter arrived with three ships, and landed at Ebbs-fleet, a spot which now lies far inland, though at that period the Wanstum was navigable for large vessels, and formed a broad barrier between the Island of Thanet and the mainland of Kent. Vortigern and his chieftains were assembled in council when the Saxons appeared, and Hengist and Horsa were summoned before them. The Saxon ships, which contained about three hundred soldiers, were drawn up beside the shore, where the adventurers anxiously awaited the issue of the interview between their leaders and the British king. Such a meeting as this could scarcely result from chance; the time of landing—the assembled council—the attendance of Hengist and Horsa, all bear evidence of some previous understanding between the parties, similar to what we have before alluded to. Vortigern first interrogated the Saxons as to the nature of their creed; Hengist enumerated the names of the gods they worshipped, and further added, that they also dedicated the fourth and sixth days in the week to Woden and Frea. Inference might be drawn from the reply of Vortigern, that the Britons were already Christians, though such a conclusion ought, doubtless, to be limited in its application to the inhabitants of our island, for we have evidence that all were not.

It was agreed that the Saxons were to assist the Britons, to drive the Scots and Picts out of the island—that for such service they were to receive food and clothing, and when not engaged

in war they were to be stationed in Ruithina, for by that name was the Isle of Thanet called by the ancient Britons. There is no evidence that Vortigern intended to give up this island, at that period, to the Saxons; the arrangement he made had nothing new in it. Centuries before, the Britons had crossed the sea, and fought in the wars of the Gauls; they had also aided the Romans: it was a common custom for one nation to hire the assistance of another; when the time of service was over, the soldiers either returned to their own country, or settled down amongst the native tribes, whom they had defended, as in Britain, many of the Romans and Gauls had done before-time. In this case, however, the result proved very different, though it would have been difficult for any one endowed with the keenest penetration to have foreseen that three small ships, probably containing in all not more than three hundred men, and these willing to render assistance on very humble terms, should point out a way over the waves, by which their companions in arms should come, and conquer, and take possession of a country which it had cost the Romans so many years of hard warfare to subjugate. The Saxons appear to have done their duty; fighting was their every-day trade: their robust natures had received no touch of Roman refinement, they earned their bread with the points of their swords, and the blows of their heavy battle-axes; they drove back the northern hordes beyond the Roman walls, and they soon grew into great favour with the Britons. All this was very natural to a nation now making rapid progress in civilization, and one wealthy enough to pay others for fighting its battles—it was a much easier life to sit comfortably in their walled cities, to follow the chase, and enjoy the luxury of the bath, than to be chasing the Picts and Scots from one county to another, through forests and morasses, and over hills and dales, day after day; but to do this securely more aid was required. Hengist and Horsa had left numbers of their countrymen behind, who would willingly fight on the same terms which they had accepted. Vortigern agreed to the proposition they made, and more Saxons were speedily sent for. Seventeen ships soon arrived, and on the deck of one of these vessels, from the stern of which the banner of the white horse waved, stood a conqueror whose long silken locks blew out in the breeze, unencumbered by either helmet or crest, who bore neither sword, spear, shield nor battle-axe, but was armed only with a pair of



Vortigern and Rowena.

beautiful blue eyes, and a face of such strange and surpassing beauty as had never before been mirrored in our island waves: such was the Saxon Princess Rowena, destined to win more broad acres from the Britons without striking a single blow, than all the northern barbarians had ever gained by their numberless invasions. On the landing of his daughter, accompanied by so many of her countrymen, a great feast would, of course, be held to celebrate the event, and there Vortigern and the British chiefs would, beyond doubt, be assembled to welcome their new allies; there is nothing remarkable in such an occurrence, nor in Rowena drinking to her father's royal guest, nor in the island king falling at once in love with the beautiful barbarian. Her drinking his health in a tongue to which he was a stranger, her natural bashfulness, on first standing in the presence of the British king—her confusion when she found her language was not understood by him—all, doubtless, contributed to make her look more interesting. Then above all to know that the blood of Woden flowed in her veins, that she had descended from a hero, whose renown in battle had raised him to the grandeur of a god, in the idolatrous estimation of his own countrymen; all these things coupled together had surely romance and poetry enough about them, aided by such a beautiful countenance, to turn a calmer brain than Vortigern's, heated as his was by love and wine. He had no peace until he married her; her image seems to have haunted his memory, and caused him more uneasiness until she became his wife, than all the inroads of the northern hordes had hitherto done. Even before this period, all had gone on smoothly and evenly between the Britons and the Saxons; but now Love himself had landed amongst the last-comers, and received the warmest welcome of them all. Who could dream that he but heralded the way for slaughter, conquest, and death to follow in, or that the beauty he accompanied should be the cause of bloodshed between the Saxons and the Britons?—yet so it was.

The Saxons were, shortly after, the sole possessors of the isle of Thanet, and the influence of Vortigern's pretty pagan wife was soon visible to the jealous eyes of the Britons. Hengist and Horsa began to demand more liberal supplies, and to cast a longing glance upon Kent; but the Britons had spirit enough to resist such a concession, and here we for a time lose sight of Vortigern and Rowena, though it is highly probable that they

retreated into the isle of Thanet, then held by the Saxons, from the coming storm. Vortimer and Catigern, the two sons of Vortigern by a former marriage, now took the command of the Britons, with whom the Roman settlers in the island appear to have joined; all resolved to make head in one common cause, and to drive the Saxons out of Britain. Hengist and Horsa, to strengthen their force, formed a league with their old brothers in plunder, the Scots and Picts, and war once more broke out in the land, more terrible in its results than it had ever been in the struggles between the Britons and the Romans. What few fragments we find in the old Welsh bards, alluding to these ancient battles, are filled with dreadful descriptions, and awful images of slaughter. We are borne onward, from the shout of the onset, to the mighty shock when the opposing ranks close in battle, when blade clashes against blade, when dark frowning men sink with gory seams on their foreheads, and tall chieftains rock and struggle together in the combat, and as each knee is brought to the ground, it rests upon a bed of gore, while battle-axes, as they are uplifted, and glitter a moment in the air, shed down crimson drops. Then gloomy biers pass by, on which "red-men" are borne; and ravens come sweeping through the dim twilight which settles over that ancient battle-field, to prey upon the fallen warriors. Such wailings as these must have caused the heart of Vortigern to have beat painfully, even when the fair head of Rowena was pillowed upon it, and to have made him sigh, and regret that such beauty had been purchased at so great a sacrifice. At the battle of the Ford-of-Eagles, long after called Eaglesford, but now Aylesford, in Kent, did Horsa, the brother of Hengist, fall; he whose banner of the white-horse had waved over many a victorious field, and been the terror of the northern tribes, now fell to rise no more. On the side of the Britons, also perished Catigern, and a sore reproach must his death have been to his father, Vortigern, when he heard the tidings! for, alas, he was wasting the hours in soft dalliance with his blue-eyed idolater, while his sons were fighting and falling in defence of their country. Vortimer had now the sole command of the Britons, and, if the ancient bards are to be believed, it was by his hand that Horsa was slain. A sad pang must such a rumour as this have sent through the aching heart of poor Rowena, as she gazed upon her husband, and in him beheld the father of her uncle's murderer, the destroyer of her

father's companion in arms—he who had shared the fortunes of Hengist, from the hour when first the prow of their ship ploughed together the sands on the British shore. One of our old chroniclers (Roger de Wendover) states that, on a future day, Rowena bitterly revenged the death of Horsa, by bribing one of Vortimer's servants to poison her son-in-law, and that thus fell, in the bloom of life, one of the noblest of the British warriors—a victim to the vengeance of his step-mother. Whether this is true or not, it is now impossible to decide, so much are the statements of our early historians at variance; one thing, however, is clear, the Saxons were defeated, and compelled to escape in their long chiules, or ships; nor do they appear to have returned until after the death of Vortimer, when, at the suggestion of Rowena, her father was again invited to Britain, and this time Hengist returned with a larger force than had hitherto landed in our island. When the Saxon landed, he made an offer of peace to the Britons, and invited the chiefs to a feast, which he gave on the occasion. Both parties were to come without their arms, such was the command issued by Hengist, and enforced on the part of the British leaders by Vortigern, who was also present. The treacherous Saxon had, however, given orders to his followers to conceal short swords or daggers under their garments, and when he gave the signal, to fall upon and slaughter every Briton present, with the exception of Vortigern. The feast commenced, the wine-cup circulated, the Saxon and British chiefs sat side by side; those who had fought together, face to face and hand to hand, were drinking from the same cup, for it appears to have been so contrived that a false-friend should be placed between every foe. Vortigern seems to have sat secure, and never once dreamed of the treachery that surrounded him; and, perhaps, even before the smile had well faded from Hengist's face, as he talked of the pleasant days that were yet in store for his unsuspecting son-in-law, he turned round and exclaimed: "*Nimed eure saxes,*" "unsheath your swords," and in a few moments after three hundred British chiefs and nobles lay lifeless upon the ground. The motto prefixed to our present chapter is from one of the poems of Golyddan, a Welsh bard, who lived within a century or two after this cold-blooded massacre, a deed which must for many a long year afterwards have rankled in the minds of the Britons, and which their bards would never allow to slumber, whenever they sang the deeds of their departed chieftains. Doubtless

Rowena was present at that bloody banquet, and with a cruel look confronted "the weak chief," as he stood pale and horror-stricken, glancing from father to daughter, and cursing the hour, as he looked into the face of the beautiful heathen, whose blue eyes could perchance gaze, without shrinking for a moment, upon those wan and clay-cold countenances that were now upturned in death. Though long years have passed away, and the hawthorns have put out their blossoms above a thousand times since the fatal May in which this terrible tragedy took place, still the eye of the imagination can scarcely conjure up the scene without a shiver. It is supposed to have been near Stonehenge where this cruel butchery took place, probably within the very circle of those Druidical monuments, some of which still stand, though at that period the whole temple was, doubtless, perfect. If, as we are led to believe, many of the British chieftains were Christians, there was something in keeping with the stern character of the Saxon pagans, in thus slaughtering their enemies in the presence of the very altars on which the islanders had formerly sacrificed to the gods they themselves worshipped, and such an act might, in their eyes, hallow even this savage revenge. To slaughter all who did not believe in their heathen creed, was with the Pagan Saxons a religious duty; they believed such acts were acceptable to their gods.

We shudder at the very thought of such a deed—nearly fourteen centuries have elapsed since the sands of Salisbury Plain drank in the blood of these victims. Yet we startle to see the dead thus piled together around the grey old stones which the footsteps of Time have all but worn away, as if we still looked calmly on while they were brought bleeding to our very thresholds. Still the historian of the past might mingle his sympathy, and carry back many a deed which has since then been done, to be rolled up and mourned over in the same great catalogue of cruelty. The shadows that move through the old twilight of time, bend under the weight of the "red-men" that are borne upon the bier. The form of Hengist seems to stand leaning upon the red pillars that mark the entrance to the Hall of Murder in Valhalla, as if wondering "why the chariot wheels so long delayed," and the guests that still tarried behind, hastened to the banquet of skulls, which stood awaiting their coming, in the halls of Odin. For such a deed stamps him as a fitting servitor in that horrible hall of slaughter.

At Crayford in Kent, another great battle was fought between the Saxons and the Britons, in which the latter were defeated with great slaughter, and so complete was the victory, that the remnant of the British army were compelled to retreat into London. But with all his success, Hengist was unable to keep possession of little more than the county of Kent, and the island of Thanet, and even this, it appears, he would have found it difficult to retain, but for the dissensions which were ever breaking out amongst the British chiefs. The Britons were able at this very time to send out twelve thousand armed men into Gaul, to war against the Visigoths, so that there can be but little doubt that, had unity reigned amongst them, they would have found no difficulty in driving out the Saxons, as they had done before-time. The island seems to have been so divided at this period, and under the command of so many different chiefs or kings, that they cared not to bring their united forces to bear upon one corner of the kingdom, especially that where the presence of Vortigern still appears to have been acknowledged; for it is probable that the British king, after the death of his son, settled down in his old age, amongst the Saxons, "a sadder and a wiser man." We even hope, in spite of his misdeeds, and the miseries into which his love for a fair face plunged the whole island of Britain, that there is no truth in the statements of our early Saxon historians, who have left it on record that he fled into Wales, where, hated alike "by slave and free-man, monk and layman, strong and weak, small and great," he at last perished with the fair Rowena, and all his family, in those flames which destroyed the fortress where he had sought shelter from his enemies. Yet many venerable names might be brought forward in support of this story of the terrible end of an ancient British king. A dreadful fate for fair Rowena, if true, and all the evidence is sadly in its favour, and from our hearts, we cannot help pitying the poor girl, who with downcast eyes, as she held the golden goblet in her hand, listened to the promises which the island monarch poured into her ears; who stepped from the deck of her father's galley, to share a throne, yet appears never to have forsaken her husband in all the varied vicissitudes of his chequered life; but through battle, flood, and fire, to have trod the same perilous path with him, hand in hand, sometimes, it may be, when alone, shedding tears at the remembrance of her father's cruelties, weeping one hour, for the death of her own friends, and

the next, comforting Vortigern for the loss of those he mourned. We picture her, as in the joyousness of her heart she left her native home to meet her father—no mother appears to have accompanied her—and, pagan as she was, we know not how pure and holy the feelings of that heart might be; for, red with blood as the hands of Hengist were, they had, doubtless, many a time parted her silken ringlets, as he stooped down and imprinted a father's kiss upon her lips. Perhaps a tear stole down the deep furrows which time and care had ploughed in the weather-beaten countenance of Hengist, as he embraced her when she first landed on our island shore, as in her pure countenance he traced the image of her mother, whom he had once so fondly loved. Poor Rowena! she might have moved like a ministering angel, through all the terrors of those stormy times, her mild blue eyes beaming comfort on every woe-begone countenance on which they glanced—now soothing the restless slumber of her father, as he started up, dreaming of some new revenge, and by her falling tears, and low-breathed whispers, chasing away the dark demon from his couch; for even through the past, those gentle eyes seem to beam upon us, and the tears by which they are dimmed quench the cruel light, that when in anger, flashed from beneath her fringed eye-lids. Oh, Mercy! thou wouldst not leave that beautiful Saxon mother to perish shrieking amidst the surrounding flames! What crimes she had, sprang from her faith; she was nursed in a cruel creed; when the grim shadow of Odin fell not over and darkened her gentle heart, she was a fond woman, even as our mothers have ever been. But she is dead and gone. Hengist is now no more, and Eric, his son, reigns sole king over the white-cliffs, and green hills, and pastoral valleys of Kent, and the keels of other chiules are grating upon our chalky headlands. The grey curtain of Time again drops down over the dead which in fancy stood before us, and after the night of death is past, a new morning breaks, that

“Laughs aside the clouds with playful scorn.”

CHAPTER X.

ELLA, CERDRIC, AND KING ARTHUR

“ He was a shield to his country .
 The courteous leader of the army ;
 His course was a wheel in battle,
 He was a city to old age ;
 The head, the noblest pillar of Britain ;
 An eagle to his foe in his thrust,
 Brave as generous ;
 In the angry warfare, certain of victory.”

LLYWARCH HEN., SIXTH CENTURY.

THE next Saxon chieftain of any note, who effected a landing in Britain, and established himself in the country, was Ella; he came, accompanied by his three sons and the same number of ships, the latter being anchored beside the Isle of Thanet, where Hengist and Horsa, twenty-eight years before, became auxiliaries under Vortigern. From the south of Kent, a vast forest extended into Sussex and Hampshire, a huge uncultivated wilderness, called Andreade, or Andredswold, measuring above a hundred miles in length, and a long day's march in breadth, for it was full thirty miles wide, and abounded with wolves, deer, and wild boars. Near the Sussex entrance of this primeval English forest, Ella fought his first battle, and drove the Britons into the wide wooded waste. After a time, the Saxon chief received fresh reinforcements, and not until then did he venture to attack the ancient British town which was named Andredes Ceaster, and stood, strongly fortified, on the edge of the forest. While the Saxons were attempting to scale the walls, a body of the Britons rushed upon them from the wood, and, thus attacked in the rear, the invaders were compelled to turn their backs upon the town and carry the fight into the forest. Three times was the assault renewed, for no sooner were the Saxons at the foot of the wall than the Britons were upon their heels; each time Ella's loss was severe; night came, and both parties rested until the morrow, encamped within sight of each other. With sunrise, the battle was renewed, and the Saxon chief this time drove the Britons still further into the forest, but all was useless—they knew every turning and every thicket that afforded a

shelter, and by the time the besiegers had again reached the town, the brave islanders were there, ready to pin the first Saxon to the wall who attempted to scale it, with the unerring javelins which they could hurl to an inch. The forces under Ella became furious; they stood between two enemies; they were attacked both from the town and the forest; whichever way they turned, the pointed spears of the Britons were presented. At length, the Saxon chief divided his army into two bodies: one he commanded to drive the Britons into the forest, and to prevent them from returning; the other, at the same time, began to break down the walls. Revenge was now the order of the day: maddened by their losses, and irritated by the long delay, the merciless Saxons put every soul within the walls to death—neither man, woman, nor child, did they leave alive; such a massacre had never before taken place. Even the walls were levelled to the earth, and, for ages after, that town stood by the gloomy forest, silent, ruined, and desolate; until even the time of Edward the First it was pointed out to the stranger; and though the long grass, and the moss, and the lichen, had grown grey upon its ruins, there were still traces of its fallen grandeur “which,” in the words of the old chronicler, “showed how noble a city it had once been.”

It is painful, even only in fancy, to picture the return of those British warriors from the forest; how startling must have been the very silence which reigned over those ruins, the vast dreary woodland wilderness behind, the levelled walls and the bodies of the dead before—here the remains of a beloved home which the destroying fire had blackened—on the hearth a beautiful form, with her long hair steeped in her own heart’s blood, her child stretched across her arm, over which the heavy rafter had in mercy fallen, the wolf already prowling about the threshold. Even through the night of time, we can almost hear their moans—each warrior reproaching himself for having fled, and envying the unbroken sleep of the slain. How looked those British fathers and husbands when they again met the Saxon slayers in battle? Who marvels, after reading of such deeds as these, that they hung the heads of their enemies at their sides—that they found music in the gurgling of their blood—that as the foe expired they stood calmly looking on, mocking him with a solemn death-chaunt, and telling the dying man of the wife and home he would never see again—of the savage laugh, “bitter and sullen as

the bursting of the sea, of the dead which in their fury they mangled—of the joy with which they hailed the flapping of the raven's wings, as they heard them descending upon the battle-field?" Such images would madden revenge select to express its triumph in, and the only marvel is, that so many beautiful passages, expressive of grief, and sorrow, and heart-broken despair, are scattered over the wild wailings of the early British bards. Yet such scenes as we have here depicted it was theirs to deplore—such revenge as they took, when the current of battle bore them on to victory, it was theirs to exult in, and their bards, gifted with the power of song, retired to mourn like the dove, or sallied forth to destruction with the scream of the eagle. They were familiar with the images of death, were called upon every day to defend their lives, and were never certain that she, whose beautiful smile beamed love on their departure in the morning, would in the evening stand waiting upon the threshold to welcome their return. Neither the weeping mother, nor the smiling child, had, in those days, power to turn aside the edge of the Saxon sword. Thus was the second Saxon kingdom called Sussex, established, by Ella, and his three sons.

Eighteen years after, another of Woden's descendants, named Cerdric, came with his followers in five ships. Where they landed is uncertain, though it does not appear that we should be much in error if we fixed upon Yarmouth, which for centuries after was called Cerdricksand, and known by that name even in Camden's day. At the time of his landing, the Britons were in possession of the whole island, with the exception of Kent and Sussex, and the Saxons who inhabited these kingdoms appear to have aided the new-comers. Battle followed upon battle as usual, and we are thankful that only so few scanty records exist, for it would be wearisome to go over such successive bead-rolls of slaughter. Nor was Cerdric allowed to land peaceably, for, like Julius Cæsar above five centuries before, he had to fight his way from the first moment of leaving the deck of his vessel. One great battle, however, was fought, in which the British king Natanleod was slain; the two armies met at Churdfrið, and in the onset the islanders appear to have had the advantage. Natanleod commenced the attack on the right wing of the Saxons, broke through the line, bore down the standards, and compelled Cerdric

to retreat. Years had passed away since the Britons had before mustered such a force; they pursued the routed foe across the field with terrible slaughter. The victory, however, was far from being complete, for while the Britons plunged forward, hot and eager in the pursuit, the forces under the command of the son of Cerdric closed upon the flank of the pursuing army and compelled them to wheel round and defend themselves. The Saxon chief also recovered from the panic, and attacked them in front; thus the Britons were hemmed in on both sides, and their centre was soon broken. All was now hurry, retreat, confusion, and slaughter; quarter was neither craved nor given, those who could not escape fought and fell, and when the battle was ended, the body of the British king lay surrounded by five thousand of his lifeless warriors. It will be readily imagined that Cerdric must have received great assistance from Kent and Sussex to have won such a victory, and it is evident that the leagued forces did not separate without extending their ravages—many a fair province was desolated, the inhabitants slaughtered, their houses burnt to the ground, and their priests mercilessly butchered; for wherever the Christian religion abounded, there the sword of the Saxon was found unsheathed.

Stuf and Wihtgar next came, both of them Cerdric's kinsmen, and it seems as if scarcely a favourable wind now blew, without wafting a fresh fleet of Saxon chiefs to the British coast. They evidently began to look upon Britain as their own; so many relations came one after the other and settled down, and never returned, that we can imagine the only topic of conversation now in Jutland was about Britain—that houses and lands were at a discount—that everybody was either purchasing or building ships—that the old crones reaped quite a harvest in standing upon the headlands and sending prayers after the vessels, for Jutes, Angles, and Saxons were now all astir; rumours had flown over the ocean that there were kingdoms for those who dare venture for them, and that, no matter how distant the descent might be, so long as the voyager had a drop of Woden's blood in his veins, there was a crown for him if he could but find followers to fight for it. Nor had the poor Britons any hope left, for as one died off there was always another ready to succeed. Cynric followed Cerdric; he passed away, and Cealwin came—killed two or three British kings, of

whom we know nothing, excepting that one was called Conmail, another Condidan, and the third Farinmail—added the cities of Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bristol to his dominions—and finally established the kingdom of Wessex, which included several counties, beside the Isle of Wight. But we must not thus hurry over this stirring period, for a new champion had sprung up amongst the Britons, the king Arthur of old romance, the hero of poetry and fable, the warrior whose very existence has, to many, become a matter of doubt. What little we know of any of the British kings who existed at this period, is almost limited to the bare mention of their names. A new language had sprung up, and, excepting among the conquered, there was no one left to record the deeds of the British heroes, but the Welsh bards; for what sympathy could the worshippers of Woden have with the warriors who spoke another language, and followed a creed so different to their own? What should we have known of the earlier Britons but for Julius Cæsar? Who can doubt but that the Saxons cared only to chronicle the deeds of their own countrymen, or who can tell how many records were destroyed by the misbelieving Danes on a later day? We have more than tradition to prove the existence of Arthur: he is alluded to by the ancient bards, and mentioned by them in succession, for as one caught up and carried forward the Cymric lay of another, so did he allude to warriors of other days. The Saxons had enough to do to record their own conquests, and left the Britons to mourn over their own disasters, for what they remembered with feelings of pride would to the new-comers be a source of regret; a British victory would but afford them a theme for a dirge, and the very memory of a hero who had occasionally triumphed over them would be a source of pain. Those who furnished Gildas and Nennius with the subjects for their histories would not be such as kept a record of the bravery of the Britons, yet Arthur is mentioned by them both. These venerable chroniclers could but tell what they heard; many of the Welsh bards fought in the battles of which they sang, and even defeat, as well as victory, was alike woven into their lays. No such remains are found amongst the Saxon historians, yet they both mention the battles in which Arthur fought: he was a British king; and, though Gildas was living within twenty years after the death of Arthur, he had but little sympathy for him—nevertheless he praises his valour.

Arthur is the last British king in whose fortunes we strongly sympathize. We see his native land about to be wrested from him. In every corner of the island are strangers landing, and taking possession of the soil. In almost every battle the Britons are defeated; they who, from the first dawning of history, had been the possessors of the island, are about to be driven from it, and that, too, at a period when they were just becoming familiar to us. As we feel for and with them at this time, so do the Saxons at last interest us, and there our sympathy ends; the Normans never become so endeared to us as they have been. From their first landing we seem to dislike them, even more than we do the Saxons, whom we begin to see darkening every point of the land, for as yet they are Pagans, and just as they gather upon our favour, the Danes approach; and then we feel as much interested on the side of the Saxons as we do now on that of the Britons. For there are currents in history which bear us forward against our will—we struggle against them in vain—we are swept onward through new scenes, and whirled so rapidly amongst past events, that we no longer cling to passing objects to retard our courses; but as the wide ocean opens out before us, we gaze upon its vastness in wonderment, and are lost in the contemplation of the shifting scenes which are ever chasing each other over its surface. The forms that fall upon the pages of history, are like the sunshine and shadow pursuing each other over the face of the ocean, where the golden fades into the grey; and as each wave washes nearer to the shore, it is ever changing its hue, from gloom to brightness, until it breaks upon the beach, and is no more. Arthur leading on the Britons, with the image of the Virgin upon his shield, seems, in our eyes, only like some armed phantom, standing upon the rim of the horizon at sunset, and pointing with his sword towards the coming darkness; then he sinks behind the rounded hill, never to appear again. His twelve battles have a glorious indistinctness,—they sink one behind the other in the sunset, just as we can trace the bright armour, and the drooping banners, and the moving host, in the fading gold of the clouds,—they then melt around the dying glories of heaven. Something great and grand seems ever shaping itself before the eye; but ere we are able to seize upon any distinct feature, all is gone, never to appear again.

Arthur first appears to us checking the flight of a British prince;

we see his hand on the rein, he is about to bear off the beautiful lady, but is dissuaded from it by his companions. The cavalcade passes on, and he rides moodily at the head of his followers,—then one of the dark turnings of time shuts him out from the sight.

Sword in hand, we next behold him, in hot pursuit after a British chief, who has slain some of his soldiers; the image of the Virgin is borne rapidly through the air, his teeth are clenched, and there is a frown upon his brow. A priest approaches—others come up—they tell him that there are enemies enough to slay amongst the Saxons. The angry spot fades from his forehead, and he sits calmly in his saddle—again he vanishes.

His wife is then borne away, and we meet him breathing vengeance against the king of Somersetshire, vowing that he will, ere night, leave Melva to sleep shorter by the head—he slackens his rein for a few moments beside the gate of a monastery: good and holy men are there, the hand of a venerable man is placed upon his bridle, the image of the Virgin he bears upon his shield is appealed to; he muses for a time with his eyes bent upon the ground, he allows his war-horse to be led under the grey gateway of the monastery—his wife is restored, and Melva forgiven, and the curtain again falls.

Huel, another king of the Britons, has been tampering with the enemies of his country; he is upbraided by Arthur for his treachery, then slain by his own hand. We see him ever in the van, at the battles of Glen, Douglas, Bassas, the Wood of Caledon, Castle Gunnion, on the banks of the Rebroit, on the mountain of Cathregonian, and the battle in which the Saxons were routed on the Badon Hills, and we no longer wonder at the slow progress made by Cerdric, or that he died before the kingdom of Wessex was established. The armed troops, headed by king Arthur, stood between his advance into Wales; they remembered the hills of Bath, and the number of slain they had left upon those summits. Saving the feud with Medrawd, in which the British king received the blow by which he died, these few facts are about all that we can gather of the renowned deeds of the mighty King Arthur.

Excepting the slight mention made of him in the works of Gildas and Nennius, the former of whom, as we have before stated, was living about the period ascribed to Arthur, we find, no other record of his deeds, beyond those tradition has pre-

served in the lays of the Welsh bards. After the battle of Camlan, where Arthur received his death-blow, he was carried from the field, and conveyed to Glastonbury Abbey, and consigned to the care of a noble lady, named Morgan, who appears to have been a kinswoman of king Arthur's; in her charge he was left to be cured of his wounds. He, however, died, though his death was long kept a secret, and rumours were sent abroad that he had been removed into another world, but would one day again appear, and reign sole king of Britain. Ages after, this was believed in; it was a thought that often cheered the fading eyes of the dying Celt; he believed that he but left his children behind him for a time; and that Arthur, with the Virgin upon his shield, and his sword, "Caliburne," in his hand, would assuredly one day come and lead the remnant of the ancient Cymry on to victory. No historian, who has looked carefully into the few facts which we possess relating to this British king, has ever doubted the existence of such a belief; it was a coming devoutly looked for—the dreamy solace of a fallen nation, their only comfort when all beside had perished. No marvel that round his memory so many fables are woven—that miracle upon miracle was ascribed to him, and deed upon deed piled together, until even the lofty summit of high romance at last toppled down with all its giants, and monsters, and improbable accumulation of enemies slain, which in the days of Gil-das amounted to hundreds, and that down with it tumbled nearly all the few facts which had swelled into such an inordinate bulk from his fair fame. How it would have astonished the true Arthur, could he but have been restored to life, and by the light of the few embers which glimmered in the British huts in the evening twilight, have heard some bard, the descendant of Lly-warch the aged, who knew him well, and had looked on him, face to face, recounting his deeds at the battle of Llongberth! Yet, through the traditions of these very bards, by whom his deeds were so magnified, is his memory preserved, though above thirteen centuries have glided away. All belief in his return must, ages before this, have perished; yet his memory was not forgotten, and it is on record, that a secret had been entrusted to one who had probably descended from a long line of ancient minstrels; for the druids, who numbered bards amongst their order, had mysteries which they only confided to each other, and these were seldom revealed until the approach of death. Nor can we tell how much

they were interested in keeping the death of Arthur a secret, for we must not forget that the fires upon their altars were not wholly extinguished when the British king fell beneath the fatal blow, which he received from the hand of his nephew in the field of Camlan, for that his death was kept a secret has never been disputed.

Though the discovery of the remains of king Arthur has long been a matter of doubt, yet while it is supported by such high authority as Giraldus Cambrensis and William of Malmesbury, who were living at the period it is said to have taken place, and while even Sharon Turner has admitted it into his "History of the Anglo-Saxons," we should scarcely be justified in rejecting it from our pages. The discovery is said to have originated as follows:—

Henry the Second, during his visits into Wales, freely admitted the Welsh bards into his presence; and as he numbered amongst his own household a minstrel of some celebrity, named Pierre de Vidal, there is every reason to conclude that he was a willing listener to the ancient lays which were chanted in those days in the halls of the nobles. By one of the old British bards he was told that king Arthur was interred in Glastonbury Abbey; that the spot was marked by two pyramids, or pillars; that the body was buried very deep, to prevent the Saxons from discovering it; and that, instead of a stone coffin, the remains would be found in the trunk of a hollowed oak—a form of interment, as we have before shown, very common amongst the ancient Britons. The king transmitted this information to the abbot of Glastonbury, commanding him to dig between the pillars, and endeavour to discover the body of the British king. In the cemetery of the abbey, and between the monuments which the Welsh bard had pointed out, they commenced the search, and dug, it is said, until they came to a stone, under which they found a leaden cross, and the following inscription: "*Hic jacet sepultus inclytus Rex Arthurus in insula Avollonia.*" Though we must confess that there is something very doubtful about the inscription of a British king not being in Welsh, when the Cymry were said, at this period, to have been acquainted with letters, we will pass it by, and go on with the narrative. Sixteen feet lower, it is said, they found the outer coffin, which, as before described, was formed out of the solid stem of an oak, hollowed in the centre to contain the body. The leg-bones, we are told, were of an un-

usual size, being the breadth of three fingers longer than those of the tallest man present. These bones Giraldus, it is said, took in his hand, and also read the inscription, for he was present at the disinterment. The skull was large, and marked with ten wounds—nine of these had healed in the bone, the tenth was open, and probably showed where the mortal blow was struck that terminated his life. Near at hand, were found the remains of his wife; the long yellow hair which the ancient bards loved to dwell upon, in their descriptions of the fair queen, appeared perfect, until touched. The remains were removed into the abbey, and placed in a magnificent shrine, which, by the order of Edward the First, was placed before the high altar. In the year one thousand two hundred and seventy-six, nearly a hundred years after the bodies were discovered, the same king, accompanied by his queen, visited Glastonbury, and had the shrine opened to look upon the remains of the renowned warrior and his once fair consort. King Edward folded the bones of the reputed Arthur in a rich shroud, while his wife did the same with those of the yellow-haired queen; then placed them again reverentially within the shrine. The pillars which marked the spot where the bodies were discovered, long remained; and William of Malmsbury, who was living at the period when they were disinterred, has left an account of the inscription and figures upon the pillars, which were five-sided, and twenty-six feet high.* Neither the meanings of the inscriptions, or the figures, were at the period of the discovery rightly understood. What befel them afterwards we know not, though the fate of the abbey is well known. Whether the discovery of these remains be true or not, there cannot be a doubt about the existence of king Arthur; for, were there even no allusion made to him by Gildas and Nennius, who lived near upon the period when he was waging war with Cerdric and Cealwin; or by the British bards, who knew him personally, and even fought under his command,—were there no such undeniable evidence as the above, the traditions which so long preserved his remembrance would go far to prove his existence. But these throw no light upon the achievements by which he became so renowned; it is like discovering the casket without the gem—there is evidence of the treasure, and the care with which it was preserved, but what the treasure itself was, we know not. What few facts we

* Turner's Anglo-Saxons, vol. i. p. 293.

have thrown together, are all that can really be depended upon as the true history of king Arthur: his knights, his round table, and the deeds which are attributed to him, must ever stand amongst the thousand-and-one tales which a wonder-loving people have treasured in all ages, and some of which are found even amongst the most barbarous nations. They appear to have been such as raised Woden into a god in the darkest era of Saxon paganism; and as Roman civilization seems never to have spread far amongst the ancient Cymry in Wales, we are justified in concluding that they also loved to shed around the memory of their bravest chieftain the same mysterious reverence, and that what was wanting to make up the unnatural stature of the image of their idolatry, they piled up from old legends and time-out-of-mind fables, that "give delight, but hurt not." The discovery of king Arthur's remains is at best but doubtful history.

CHAPTER XI.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SAXON OCTARCHY.

"Over the hawk's station, over the hawk's banquet of heads,
Over the quivering of the spears, reddening was the wing;
Over the howling of the storm the course of the sea-gull was seen;
Over the blood, whirling and flowing, the exulting ravens were screaming,
They hovered above the treasure of the fierce-winged race,
And their clamour went spreading through the sky."

CYNDDELU'S DEATH OF OWEN.

DURING the period in which the events occurred that are narrated in the opening pages of our last chapter, another body of Saxons had arrived in Britain, and settled down in Essex, where under Erkenwin they laid the foundation of that kingdom or state, which eventually extended into Middlesex, and included London—then a town of considerable note, though bearing no marks of its high destiny, as its few houses heaved up and overlooked the Thames. Little did the fisherman dream, as he turned back to gaze upon his humble home, where the morning sunbeams fell, that the hut in which he had left his children asleep, stood where a city would one day rise, that should be-

come the metropolis of England, and the envy of surrounding nations. Still less did those ancient Saxons, as they landed in the marshes of Essex, ever imagine that they were marching onward towards a town, whose renown would one day spread to the uttermost ends of the earth, a city which would at last arrest the gaze of the whole wide world, whose grandeur would only be eclipsed by its greatness, and stand the sun of the earth, defying all eyes to point out, amid the blaze of its splendour, where its brightness began or where it ended. But while the tide which bore on a new population was thus setting in, and the kingdom of East Anglia was formed by a portion of the Saxon tribe, who have left no other names behind than those given to the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk, the most formidable force that had hitherto arrived in Britain, since the time of the Romans, landed between the Tweed and the Firth of Forth. Forty ships were at once anchored near the mouths of these rivers, and from them stepped on shore, Ida and his twelve sons, with a number of nameless chiefs, who belonged to the tribe of Angles, and a long train of Saxon followers, all of whom had sworn to acknowledge Ida as their king, for he also claimed descent from the inexhaustible stock of Woden. Between the Clyde and the Humber, the country was divided amongst many of the British tribes, all of whom had their separate king, or chief, and were ever doing their utmost, unconsciously, to aid the conquest of the Saxons, by waging war with each other. Bernicia and Deira, as they were afterwards called, were at the time of Ida's landing governed by the following kings or chiefs, for it is difficult to distinguish their proper titles, named Gall, Dyvedel, Ysgwnell, Urien, the patron of Taliesin the bard, Rhydderch the generous, Gwallog, Aneurin, himself a poet, together with other sovereigns whose very names have perished, and who all appear to have, for once, united, and made a bold stand against the advance of Ida.

We have now the light of these ancient bards to guide us through this remote period, and some of them fought in the battles of which they have left us descriptions. Chief amongst these British warriors appears to have been Urien; Taliesin calls him the "shield of heroes, the thunderbolt of the Cymry," and compares his onset to "the rushing of mighty waves, and fiery meteors blazing athwart the heavens." Ida, they designated the flame-man, or flame-bearer, so terrible was the devastation which he made. Many battles were fought between these renowned

chieftains. It was on the night which ushers in the Sabbath, when the "Flame-bearer" approached, with his forces divided into four companies, to surround Goddeu and Reged, provinces over which Urien governed. Ida spread out his forces from Argoedd to Arfynnydd, and having assumed this threatening position, he daringly demanded submission and hostages from the Britons. Urien indignantly spurned the proposition, and turning to his brother chieftains, exclaimed: "Let us raise our banners where the mountain winds blow—let us dash onward with our forces over the border—let each warrior lift his spear above his head, and rush upon the destroyer, in the midst of his army, and slay him, together with his followers." Taliesin, who was present, and fought under the banner of Urien, thus describes the "Battle of the Pleasant Valley:" "When the shouts of the Britons ascended, louder than the roaring of the waves upon the storm-tossed shore, neither field nor forest afforded safety to the foe: I saw the warriors in their brave array, I saw them after the morning's strife—oh, how altered! I saw the conflict between the perishing hosts, the blood that gushed forward and soaked into the red ground:—the valley which was defended by a rampart was no longer green. Wan, weary men, pale with affright, and stained with blood, dropped their arms and staggered across the ford; I saw Urien, with his red brow—his sword fell on the bucklers of his enemies with deadly force—he rushed upon them like an eagle enraged." In this battle, the Britons appear to have been victorious—others followed in which they were defeated, for the "flame-bearing man" spread terror wherever he trod. He, however, at last fell by Owen the son of Urien, one of the poets, who also perished by the hand of one of his own countrymen, and his death was bemoaned by the British bard Llywarch, in such a plaintive strain that there are few compositions which excel this ancient elegy, for its beautiful pathos and wild, mournful images; some of these are as follows: "I bear a head from the mountains; the body will ere night be buried under the cairn of stones and earth! Where is he that supported and feasted me? Euryddiel will be joyless to-night. Whom shall I praise, now Urien is no more? The hall is stricken into ruins,—the floor desolate, where many a hound and hawk were trained for the chase. Nettles and weeds will grow over that hearth, which, when Urien lived, was ever open to the tread of the needy; the shout of the warriors as they uplifted the mead

cup, no more will be heard rioting. The decaying green will cover it, the mouldering lichen will conceal it, the thorn will above it grow; the cauldron will become rusted that seethed the deer, the sword of the warrior will no longer clank over it, no sound of harmony will again be heard there; where once the blazing torches flashed, and the deep drinking horn went round, the swine will root, and the black ants swarm, for Urien is no more!" Such were the immortal echoes that floated around our island, nearly a thousand years before Shakspeare "struck the golden lyre."

After the death of Urien, another severe battle was fought in the north between the Britons and Angles, who accompanied Ida. Aneurin, who was in the fight, has composed the longest poem which has descended to us descriptive of those ancient conflicts; it is called the "Gododin," and was held in such reverence by the Welsh bards, that they entitled him their king. It is frequently alluded to by the minstrels of the period. The poem descriptive of the battle of Catteraeth, from which Aneurin escaped, when three hundred and three score British nobles, all wearing the "golden torque," fell, contains nearly a thousand lines. Only three renowned warriors survived this awful combat; the bard was amongst the number. The British chieftains had been drinking the pale mead by "the light of rushes" all night long; with the first streak of dawn, they set out to attack the Saxons; when they came in sight of the enemy, they "hastened swift, all running together—short were their lives." Like the melancholy chorus in a dirge is this "pale mead" banquet ever repeated throughout the poem; its effects are sadly deplored, it is ever turning up and coming in upon the end of some sorrowful reflection; "pleasant was its taste, long its woe—it had been their feast, and was their poison—it was a banquet for which they paid the price of their lives." Hear Aneurin's own words: "The warriors that went to Catteraeth were furious—pale golden wine and mead had they drank; they were three hundred and three score and three, all wearing golden torques, who hastened to battle after the banquet. From the edges of the keen-slaying swords, only three escaped the war-dogs, Aeron and Dayarawd, and I, from the flowing blood were saved. The reward of my protecting muse." The battle appears to have been fought in the morning of one of their festive days; and in the grey dawn, the intoxicated chiefs ran upon the enemy all to-

gether, probably having boasted over their cups that one would outstrip the other, and be the first to dye his sword in Saxon blood. The scene of the battle cannot now be ascertained; that it was in the north we have proof, from the men of Bernicia and Deiri being present.

After these events, the kingdom called Mercia was established; it appears to have extended over our present midland counties, occupying the most important space which stretches from the Severn to the Humber, and even pushing its frontier upon the borders of Wales. This formed the eighth kingdom, state, or colony, established by the Saxons since the day when Hengist and Horsa first entered the service of Vortigern—a period occupying but little more than one hundred years, and during that time there was scarcely an interval in which the Saxons had not either to defend their hard-won possessions, or aid their countrymen when they were close pressed. The Britons had still their own kingdoms in Wales, Cornwall, a portion of Devonshire, and the district of Strathelyde; and some of these they maintained even after the death of Alfred.

We will now take a rapid glance at the eight kingdoms established by the Saxons, for although Bernicia and Deiri are frequently classed together as one state, and called Northumbria, and were occasionally under the sway of one sovereign, they were, nevertheless, distinct kingdoms for a time. Thus an octarchy was established, formed of the following eight distinct states.

First, the Jutes, who had gained Kent, where Hengist first established himself, and to which his followers added the Isle of Wight, and a portion of the opposite coast of Hampshire. This formed the kingdom of Kent.

Second, the South Saxons, who landed under Ella, and, after many a severe combat with the Britons, founded the kingdom of Sussex.

Third, the East Saxons, who, under the command of Erkenwin, gradually spread over the counties of Essex, Middlesex, and the southern portion of Hertfordshire, which afterwards became known as the kingdom of Essex.

Fourth, the West Saxons, who, headed by Cerdric, conquered the inhabitants of Surrey, part of Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Somerset, a portion of Devonshire and Cornwall, (though long after this period) and finally, founded the kingdom of Wessex.

Fifth, East Anglia, containing Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge, the Isle of Ely, and some portion of Bedfordshire, all included in the state or kingdom of East Anglia.

Sixth, Deiri, which included the counties of Lancaster, York, Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Durham.

Seventh, Bernicia, where Ida first landed, and which extended from Northumberland into Scotland, somewhere between the rivers Forth and Tweed.

Eighth, and last, Mercia, which swallowed up the chief portion of the midland counties, and was divided into the north and south by the river Trent, though all were within the limits of the dominion of Mercia. Such were the kingdoms that formed the Saxon Octarchy, and which were no sooner established, than one state began to wage war against the other, in which they were occasionally aided by the Britons.

Hitherto we have had to feel our way cautiously along the shores which skirt the dark sea of History, and have been compelled to put into many a creek and harbour at a venture, as abler mariners have done before us; but, in no instance have we stirred, without consulting the compass and carefully examining the chart which Gildas, Nennius, and Bede, those ancient voyagers, have drawn up as a guide, and which Turner and Mac Cabe* have carefully examined, and marked anew every point that is dark and doubtful.

Many events transpired before the final establishment of the Saxon Octarchy, which we have hurriedly passed over as being of little importance, and which to have narrated would have carried us again over the ground already traversed. Of such are the deaths of the Saxon kings or chiefs; the contests that arose in selecting a successor, and the bickerings and breakings out, which were necessarily consequent upon the formation of so many separate states, for few of them could be called kingdoms. Nor must we suppose, that in all cases where the conquerors settled down, the ancient inhabitants fled before them—many, doubtless, remained behind, and gradually intermixed with the Saxons; of such, probably, would be those who had grown civilized under the Roman government, and were skilled in

* A Catholic History of England. By William Bernard Mac Cabe. Carefully compiled from our earliest records, and purporting to be a literal translation of the writings of the old chroniclers, miracles, visions, &c. from the time of Gildas; richly illustrated with notes, which throw a clear, and in many instances a new light on what would otherwise be difficult and obscure passages.

the arts and manufactures, and had still continued to improve in agriculture, ever since the time of Agricola. Men possessing this knowledge, and acquainted with these secrets, would, beyond doubt, be tempted to reside amongst the invaders; and we shall soon arrive at a period, which will show that civilization had tamed down the martial spirit of the Saxon, as it had before-time done that of the Britons, and that they were for a long season as apparently helpless under the attacks of the Danes, as the ancient inhabitants of the island were under their own repeated assaults. It would be a work of great labour, and one that would require an acute analysis, to trace, step by step, this degenerative process. Many of the Britons emigrated. We have shown that twelve thousand, under a free king, Riothamus, went out to war against the Visigoths, but it would only be carrying us into the history of other countries were we to follow their footsteps. Even the Britons that remained behind, though dispossessed of nearly the whole of their country for a long time, "bated not a jot of heart nor hope;" they clung to their old prophecies, and, through the dark night of oppression, saw the ruddy streak which they believed would ere long break into the bright morning of vengeance, when they should drive the Saxons before them triumphantly out of Britain. Strengthened by this belief, they fought many a battle which we have not recorded, and even when defeated, it was only to retire to their "stony paradise," as their bards called Wales, and there await the breaking of that bright morning which had so long been foretold. There is something wild and beautiful in the very idea of this never-to-be-realized hope; it forms a prominent feature in the character of the Welsh population to this very day, though now turned into a feeling, which arms them, better than any other, against the lesser evils of life. They are ever in the hope of seeing "better days." We can readily fancy that every rumour of the outbreak amongst the Saxon tribes, must have been received with as much acclaim in their mountain fortresses, as would the first note awakened by Aneurin or Llywarch when they struck their harps. We can picture the eagerness with which they hurried down, to aid one Saxon chief to make war upon another, scarcely caring which chief conquered, so long as they themselves escaped, and believing that the body of every enemy which they left in the field was a unit nearer to the fulfilment of their fancied Millennium. They never lacked a leader, if an attack was contemplated, and we

probably err not in surmising that many an onset was made after the night had been consumed "by the light of the rushes," and while they were brimful of valour and "pale mead," and heated by the lay which some bard less renowned than Aneurin chanted. Cattreath may not be the only instance in which the wearers of the "golden torques," the ensign of nobility, fell. Still there seems to have been a hearty faith in the ancient Cymry, which endears them to us, and in nothing was this evinced more, than in their belief of the predictions of their bards. A pale ray of light, like the lingering of a subdued smile, falls upon our page whilst we write, as we contrast the "then" with the "now." The bards of other days were kings, chiefs, and renowned warriors; their harps raised them to these dignities: the bards of the present age are bards only, and however great their fame, can only receive due honour by first passing through the gate of death. The extracts with which we have enriched this chapter show the appreciation of the beautiful, in a barbarous age, and oh! let not this sentence be forgotten. All that we know of the lives of many of those ancient British kings, who were great and renowned in their day, is what has been preserved in the lays of our early bards; but for these, their very names would have perished, and Urien himself would never again have awakened the throb of a human heart. The cold contempt of the proud and the haughty, chilled not the heart of the true minstrel; with his harp in his heart, he ever goes, making music his companion, when there is none beside to hear it; and the notes he often carelessly scatters behind him, if of the true tone, are never lost. A thousand years pass away, and they still ring as freshly about the heart as those which we have here gathered, and which Llywarch, above thirteen hundred years ago, poured forth between his sighs, when he mourned for the loss of his chieftain, for there is a sadness about the dirges which we yet feel. The monuments of brass, of iron, and marble, have ages ago decayed or mouldered away, yet the echoes which arose from that ancient harp have not yet died. Time destroyeth all things excepting the Immortality of the Mind.

CHAPTER XII.

CONVERSION OF ETHELBERT.

“ The oracles are dumb, no voice or hideous hum
 Runs through the archèd roof, in words deceiving.
 Apollo from his shrine can no more divine,
 With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
 No nightly trance or breathèd spell
 Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.”

MILTON.

It will be readily supposed that many of the early Saxon chieftains, or kings, for it matters not by which title we call them, had by this time died, and been succeeded by their sons and kinsmen. That many had also perished in the wars with the Britons we have already shown, and now when the Octarchy was established, and the ancient inhabitants of the country were either conquered or driven into one corner of the island, when it might be expected that Peace had at last alighted and taken up her abode in the land, the Saxon sovereigns began to war with each other. We have before shown that when the Saxons went out to battle, they with one consent selected a king—no matter how high might be the rank of those who had sworn to serve under him, they obeyed his commands; when the war was over, each again stepped into his former dignity, and the power thus given for a time to the war-king was at an end. Some such king was acknowledged by the Saxon sovereigns, and he was called the Bretwalda, or king of Britain, though it is not clear that the other sovereigns ever paid him any homage, and the only inference we can draw from the claim set up by Ethelbert, the young king of Kent, is, that it was conferred upon that prince who was the nearest akin to Woden. Something of the kind is shadowed forth in the claim, which is grounded alone on his descent from Hengist. Ella, king of Sussex, appears to have been the first who bore the title of Bretwalda in Britain; he died, and it seems as if some time elapsed before any other of the Saxon kings assumed the title; the next that did was Ceawlin, king of Wessex. Ethelbert of Kent rose up, and disputed the claim. Ceawlin was not a man to be moved from his high estate by the descendant of Hengist, and

from this dispute sprang the first civil war between the Saxon kings. Ethelbert was but little more than sixteen, when he so daringly threw defiance in the face of the king of Wessex, and Ceawlin was at that time one of the most powerful of all the Saxon kings, and, after having defeated Ethelbert, he, on the death of Cissa, king of Sussex, annexed that kingdom to his own; nor was there a sovereign throughout the whole Saxon states bold enough to wrest the plunder from his hand. For a youth like Ethelbert to have thus bearded so powerful a king, and to have been the first to commence hostilities, and finally to have succeeded in gaining the envied title, evinces a courage and a perseverance which draw the eye anxiously forward to watch the result of his future career, nor shall we be disappointed in the issue. But, before passing to the most important event in his life, we must detail the circumstances by which it was brought on.

One day, as a monk named Gregory was passing through the market of Rome, looking, like others, on the great variety of treasures which were piled there, and for which nearly every corner of Europe had been ransacked, he was struck by a group of beautiful boys. There was something in their white naked limbs, fair complexions, and light long flowing hair, which at once arrested the eye of the kind-hearted monk. He turned to a keen-eyed merchant who was awaiting a purchaser (and who had probably many other things beside these beautiful boys to sell), and inquired from what country they had been brought? He was answered, Britain. The next question he asked was whether the inhabitants were Christians or Pagans? He was told that they were Pagans. Gregory sighed heavily when he heard this, and, as he fixed his eye with a tender and pitiful look upon these fair and beautiful slaves, he exclaimed: "Oh, grief of griefs! that the author of darkness should lay claim to beings of such fair forms—that there should be so much grace in the countenance, yet none in the soul."

When told that they were of the race of the Angles, he said they were worthily named, for their faces were angelic; and when informed that the province from which they came was called the Deiri, he paused—divided the word, dwelt upon it, then exclaimed, "De-ira Dei (from the wrath of God) they must be torn." But when he further heard that the king of the country from whence they came was named Ella, the beautiful

picture which had opened before his imagination, merely conjured up from the ideas created by suggestive sound, was complete, and, in his happy enthusiasm, he exclaimed, "Hallelujah! the praise of God must yet be sung in that land." Imagine the quivering lip and tearful eye which would first show the impression of a kind-hearted man and a scholar, when told that these fair children had been dragged from their homes, and brought from a distant island, far away over the sea, and stood there huddled together, seeking to avoid the merciless eye of the unfeeling merchant, who found them the most troublesome part of the cargo he had brought, for the bales he probably sat upon required no feeding, and as a point of business he had been compelled to keep those young slaves plump and in good order, and doubtless, while showing them to the monk, he made them display themselves to the best advantage. They, struck by the kindness which must have beamed, like a glory, around the countenance of the good monk Gregory, perhaps wished that they might be purchased by so friendly-looking a master, for they would be unable to comprehend a single word he said beyond the names of their country and kings. The quivering lip and tearful eye would soon change into the lighted look of enthusiasm, as, bit by bit, the Pagan island rose before the fancy of the tender-hearted monk, as he saw their beautiful heathen mothers and fairer sisters kneeling before senseless stocks and stones; and oh! what a chill must have come over his kind heart when the pope, whom he entreated to send missionaries into that heathen land, rejected his petition. Still it prevented not good Gregory from purchasing the slaves, who had so deeply interested him. He further clothed and educated them, and would, had he not been prevented, have accompanied them on their return to Britain.

Monk Gregory, at last, became the Roman pontiff; but the splendour by which he was now surrounded altered not his gentle nature; he remembered those beautiful barbarians,—had many a time thought of their island home over the waves, and the fair mothers who looked in vain for their return; and he solicited a monk, to whom he had doubtless before-time confided this wish, which ever seems to have been nearest his heart, to undertake the journey; and Augustin was chosen to fulfil this mission. The monks who were appointed to attend Augustin in his mission had heard such rumours of the ferocity of the Saxons, that they

expressed a desire to return to Rome, although they had proceeded some distance on their journey; and they so far gave way to their fears as to prevail upon Augustin to go back and solicit the pope to recal them. The pontiff, however, told them that to abandon an undertaking which they had commenced was more disgraceful than if they had not accepted it; bade them proceed in God's name, appointed Augustin abbot over them, and commanded them to obey him. Further, he gave them letters to the prelates and kings through whose countries they would have to pass.

To the daughter of Charibert, king of the Franks, Ethelbert was married; and although she was a Christian, and he a pagan, it had been no bar to their union; Bertha was to follow her own creed, Ethelbert his: he bowed before Woden, she acknowledged the existence of the true God. Vortigern and Rowena had lived together on the same terms before-time. Augustin arrived in Britain, with his train of fifty monks and interpreters, which the king of the Franks had provided, and landed in the isle of Thanet. How different the intent of his mission to that of the Saxon chiefs who had landed there a century and a half before him! They came to kill, to earn their wages by bloodshed; these came to save, and were neither armed with spear, sword, nor battle-axe; their only shield was the cross of Christ, and on their banner the figure of the Redeemer was borne. They came with no other war-cry than the Litany which they chanted as they moved gravely along. What glorious scenes illustrative of the progress of our religion yet remain to be painted! How easy to picture that ancient procession as it passed: their landing from the ship: their prayer offered up on the beach: the misbelieving Saxons looking on in wonder: some priest of Woden pouring into the ear of a listening chief a disparaging story: the countenances of children looking on with a mixture of fear and wonder: heathen mothers pitying the figure upon the banner, and wondering what he had done to be nailed upon the cross; or perhaps thinking that they had come to solicit aid against those who had been guilty of such inhuman cruelty, and their motherly hearts at once enlisted in favour of the strangers, who came to seek the means of vengeance for such an outrage. Or perhaps they pitied the poor monks who had no arms to defend themselves, and entreated their husbands to assist them. Such fancies would naturally float over their benighted minds, for at what other conclusions could they arrive from what they now

saw? Doubtless the ship, when first seen out at sea, would awaken other thoughts, and many an armed figure paced the shore impatiently, and awaited the arrival of the vessel, drawing circles upon the sand with their pointed weapons, to while away the time, as they stood ready to offer up fresh victims on the altar of Odin.

Ethelbert received the tidings of their coming rather coldly, but still not unkindly; he bade them to remain where they were, supplied them with such things as their immediate wants required, and promised, in the meantime, to consider what he would do for them. The bright eyes of Bertha had had their influence; her sweet voice had made an inroad into the stony heart of Ethelbert; but for her beautiful face, he would probably have consigned the whole race of trembling monks to Neiflheim and Hela the terrible, or offered them up as a rich sacrifice to Odin. But even Bertha, great as her power appears to have been over him, could only influence him in their favour by slow degrees; he deliberated for several days before he consented to meet them, and when he did at last agree to a conference, he chose the open air,—still true to his ancient faith, for there he had been taught to believe that all magical influence was powerless. How looked he when he first beheld them?—Perhaps he clung to the fair Christian that stood by his side, and as she pressed his arm, and he felt that she also was of the same faith, the colour mounted his cheek for a moment, and, as it would appear, his heart half reproached him for having treated them so coldly, for he at once kindly commanded the missionaries to sit down. Doubtless the spot chosen for this interview was a circle surrounded with seats of turf, such as the Saxons assembled in, in the early ages, when their witena-gemots were held in the open air. Surrounded with his nobles, the king listened attentively until Augustin had made known the object of his mission. Ethelbert, who was endowed with clear judgment, waited patiently till the abbot had finished, and then answered: “Your promises are fair, but new and uncertain. I cannot abandon the rites which my people have hitherto observed; but as you have come a long way to tell us what you believe to be true, we will not only hold you harmless, but treat you hospitably. Nor will we forbid any one you can convince to join in your faith.” Such was the substance of Ethelbert’s answer; a more candid or a kinder one never issued from a pagan’s lips;

but those lips had been breathed on by the prayers of Bertha, and her own rounded roses had kissed their way into his heart; he had found the honey that hung upon them, far sweeter than the richest sacrifice that ever steamed up from the altars of Woden. Ethelbert gave them a church in Canterbury, which was built in the time of the Romans. The British Christians had there bowed to their Maker; it had been Bertha's place of worship, and was probably the only one in the wide county of Kent where prayers to the true God were offered up,—where she herself had many a time, amid hopes and fears, prayed for the day to come which had at last arrived. She, a stranger in a foreign land, far away from the home of her fathers, surrounded by pagan altars and the hideous images of rude idols, had never once despaired, as she leant, like Hope, upon her anchor, with no one near to comfort her, but even while the hymns of Odin rang upon her ear, in the midst of her devotions, had kept her eye fixed upon the star which was mirrored in the troubled waters that washed around the cold anchor, and chilled her naked feet.

In this ancient British church, Augustin and his monks administered the rites and ceremonies of the Christian religion unmolested,—numerous converts were soon made, and baptised, and chief amongst these was king Ethelbert. As a proof of his earnestness and sincerity, the newly converted Saxon sovereign granted the monks permission to repair all the British churches in his kingdom, which had before-time been devoted to Christian worship. The pope also conferred on Augustin the title of archbishop, and sent him over a pall, woven from the purest and whitest lamb's-wool, and chequered with purple crosses, that, when worn over his shoulders, it might remind him of Christ the good Shepherd, and of the crosses and perils he endured in bringing home the lost sheep on his shoulders, and gathering them together in the fold. But vestments for the altar, sacerdotal garments, sacred vessels, and relics of martyrs, were not all that Gregory sent over to Britain; for manuscript Bibles, copies of the Gospels, psalters, and legends of the saints and martyrs, were among the more substantial treasures which the learned pope poured into our island, and some of which our own immortal Alfred translated with his own hand in a later day. The bindings of many of these manuscripts were emblazoned with silver images of our Saviour, and glittering glories of yellow

gold, from the centre of which blazed precious stones, so that when uplifted by the priest, who stood high above their heads as he expounded the holy mysteries, their eyes were dazzled by the splendour of those richly bound volumes, and their senses impressed with a solemn reverence, as they looked upon the image of their Redeemer. He also sent over other fellow-labourers, and amongst these were men distinguished for their piety and learning. Gregory was a man endowed with great discernment, possessing also those peculiar qualities which have ever marked the profoundest statesmen; in these essentials he stood high above his archbishop Augustin. The far-seeing pope knew that he had to deal with a race of idolaters, many of whom would change their creed to please their sovereign, or from other interested motives; and, conscious of the purity of his own design and the holiness of his cause, he resolved that there should be nothing startling or forbidding, or much at variance with their ancient customs, in the outward signs and ceremonies of the Christian religion. With a liberality of opinion far outstriding that of the age, he rightly concluded, that whatever was not really evil in itself, it was useless to abolish. Let them retain their sacrifices, argued Gregory; when the idols are removed, and the remembrance of them destroyed, let them slaughter their cattle, sacrifice, and feast upon the offering, and thank God for his great abundance. What mattered it if on saint-days they erected arbours of green branches around the church, feasted, and made merry within them, so long as it was done in remembrance of the saint to whom the building was dedicated? Surely this was better than holding such celebration in honour of senseless idols. Even their pagan temples he would not allow to be hurled down, conscious that if such places had been held sacred while set apart for the worship of graven images of wood or stone, they would be doubly revered when the light of the true gospel broke in glory within those ancient walls.

Pope Gregory had, doubtless, become acquainted with the principal points of their heathen faith, and had concluded that if only rapine and slaughter, and brave but brutal deeds, had been extolled within those walls, and were the sure passports that opened the envied halls of Valhalla, he might safely venture to wrestle with this pagan idol, and overthrow him upon his own ground: that the doctrines which breathed only of peace and goodwill, and love and charity, and holy faith in a dying Redeemer,

would still be the same if offered up from the very altars on which Odin himself had stood. It was the substance and the spirit which dawned upon the great intellectual eye of Pope Gregory, and made him tread boldly amongst the broken idols which lay scattered at his feet, where others would have hesitated to have moved. He daringly grafted the true faith upon a heathen stock, well knowing that neither the stem nor the soil would militate against the growth of the goodly fruit with which the branches would on a future day be hung. Gregory would never have entered into that fatal controversy beneath the oak, as Augustin had done, about the celebration of Easter Sunday, and which, if it did not lead to the slaughter of the monks of Bangor, as some have believed, lessened the archbishop in the eyes of the English priests, and caused much dissension and bitter feeling amongst the Saxons. But Ethelbert, Bertha, and Augustin died; and Eadbald became king of Kent.

Eadbald took possession of his father's throne and widow at the same time; for, after the death of Bertha, Ethelbert had married another princess of the same nation as his former wife. The priests raised their voices, and denounced the marriage of Eadbald with his step-mother; he heeded them not, but turned pagan again, and a great portion of his subjects changed their religion with him. Sigebert, the king of Essex, his father's friend, who had become a Christian, also died about this time, and his sons again embraced their old heathen creed, though they still occasionally visited the Christian church. They were one day present while the bishop was administering the Eucharist: "Why dost thou not offer us that white bread which thou art giving to others," said they, "and which thou wert wont to give to our father's sib?" The bishop made answer, that if they would wash in the same font in which their father the king was baptized when he became a Christian, they might partake of the white bread. They replied, that they would not be washed in the fountain, yet they demanded the bread. The bishop refused to give it them, and the heathen chiefs drove the monks out of Essex. Some of them went into Kent, others left Britain for a time; and as the remnant were on the eve of departing, Eadbald, by a strange interposition, again renounced his pagan faith, and intreated the priests to remain behind, promising also to assist them, as his father Ethelbert had before done, in the work of conversion. Whether it was a dream, or



Conversion of Ethelbert.

the reproaches of his own conscience, or the penance which Laurence had inflicted upon himself, before he again appeared in the presence of Eadbald, or the working of His mighty hand "who moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform," can never be known. Suffice it that the Saxon king saw the "error of his ways" and repented.

CHAPTER XIII.

EDWIN, KING OF THE DEIRI AND BERNICIA.

"How oft do they their silver bowers leave
To come to succour us that succour want;
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant,
Against foul fiends to aid us militant;
They for us fight, they watch, and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us plant,
And all for love, and nothing for reward;
Oh! Why should heavenly God to men have such regard."

SPENSER'S FAERY QUEEN.

BERNICIA and the Deiri formed, at this period, two Saxon kingdoms, which lay bordering on each other. Ethilfrith governed the portion that stretched from Northumberland to between the Tweed and the Frith of Forth; and Ella, dying, left his son Edwin, then an infant, to succeed him as king of the Deiri—a part of England now divided into the counties of Lancaster, York, Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Durham. The Northumbrian king, Ethelfrith, appears at this time to have been the most powerful of all the Saxon monarchs; and no sooner was Ella dead, than he took possession of the Deiri; nor was a sovereign to be found throughout the whole of the Saxon kingdoms bold enough to draw his sword in the defence of Edwin. The child was, however, carried into Wales, and entrusted to the care of Cadvan, who was himself a British king, though now driven into the very corner of those territories over which his forefathers had for ages reigned. There is something romantic in this incident of the child of a Saxon king having to fly to his father's enemies for shelter, and in being indebted to

those whom his own countrymen had rendered all but homeless, for his life. Ethelfrith, however, had at one period desolated more British districts than any of his predecessors, and in proportion as he was hated by the Cymry, so would they endeavour to cherish an object armed with such claims as Edwin's, in the hope of one day seeing him a leader, and at their head, when again they measured swords with their old enemies. But this they were not destined to witness, nor were they able to protect the young king when he grew up, for Ethelfrith was ever in pursuit of him—the figure of the stripling Edwin seemed to stand up between him and the kingdom of Deiri, as if he felt that, whilst the son of Ella was alive, he but sat insecurely in the midst of his new territory. For several years Edwin was compelled to wander about from province to province, keeping both his name and rank a secret, and trusting to strangers to protect him, as if he feared that the emissaries of Ethelfrith were ever at his heels—until even his existence seems to have been a burthen to him, and he doubtless many a time cursed the hour that ever he was born the son of a king. From infancy had his life been sought, by one who ought to have defended him when he was left a helpless child, and heir to the possessions his father had won by conquest—by murder; for sorry we are, as true historians, to state, that not a Saxon king throughout the whole British dominions could trace his origin to any other source: nor had William the Norman, on a later day, any better claim to the British crown. The title of royalty was ever in ancient times written with a red hand. Thank Heaven! it is no longer so, nor has the brow which a golden crown encircles, any need now to be first bathed in human blood.

Edwin is somehow endeared to us, through having descended from that king whose name attracted the attention of monk Gregory in the slave-market of Rome, when he was first struck by the beauty of those British children; for they came from the Deiri, the kingdom which he governed, whose name called forth the Allelujah to which the good monk, in the joyousness of his heart, as he saw the figure of Hope glimmering brightly in the far distance, gave utterance. From very childhood Edwin's life was a romance, and many a painful feeling must he have endured whilst sheltering amongst the Britons in Wales, who were then writhing beneath the oppression of their Saxon conquerors: allusions to his own father, or his kindred, or curses

heaped upon his countrymen, must ever have been issuing from the lips of the humbled Cymry; and who can tell but that to avoid these painful feelings, he set out alone—a stranger amid strangers. Weary of this wandering life, he at last threw himself upon the generosity of Redwald, king of East Anglia, and who was at that time honoured with the proud title of the Bretwalda of Britain, as Ethelbert of Kent had been before. Edwin acquainted him with his secret, and Redwald promised to protect him. But his hiding-place was soon known to Ethelfrith, who lost no time in sending messengers to Redwald, first with the offer of rich presents, then with threats: and when he found that neither persuasion nor bribes were effective, he determined to wage war against the king of East Anglia, unless he at once gave up Edwin. Redwald at last wavered, for in almost every battle the Northumbrian king had been victorious; nor would he probably have seized upon the Deiri, in the face of six powerful Saxon sovereigns, but for the consciousness of the strength he possessed, and the terror attached to his name. The East Anglian king at last reluctantly promised to surrender his guest. Edwin had a friend in Redwald's court who made him acquainted with the danger that awaited him, and urged him at once to escape. But the poor exile, weary of the miserable existence he had so long led, and the many privations he had endured, refused to fly for his life. "If I am to perish," said the young king, "he that destroys me will be disgraced, and not myself. I have made a compact with Redwald that I will not break. And whither should I fly, after having wandered through so many provinces in Britain without finding a shelter? How can I escape my persecutor?" His friend was silent, and left Edwin to sit alone and brood over his own thoughts. Night came and found the sorrowful king still sitting upon the same cold stone beside the palace, where he appears to have fallen asleep, and to have dreamt that a strange figure approached him, placed his hand upon his head, and bade him to remember that sign; after having caused him to make several promises as to what he would do in future, if restored to his kingdom, the stranger seemed to depart, having first held out hopes that he should conquer his enemies, and recover the territory of Deiri. There was nothing very wonderful in such a dream, beyond the fact that it should afterwards become true; and, although we cannot go so far as the venerable

chronicler Bede, in the belief that some spirit had appeared to the young king—still dreams and visions are so interwoven with the sleep that resembles death, and seem, somehow, more allied with the shadows which we believe to people another state of existence, that we can easily imagine, at that dark period, how firm must have been the reliance of our forefathers upon the phantoms which were thus conjured up, by the continuation of such a train of waking thoughts.

Such miracles as the early monkish historians devoutly believed in, the boldest writer would scarcely venture to work out in a book professedly treating of only the wildest subjects of fiction. Yet there are amongst the writers of history those, who think it an act of dishonesty to pass over the dreams, visions, and miracles of the early ages, and a want of faith not to believe in them now, as our forefathers did in the olden time. They might as well insist upon our copying out the recipes from such old works as were to be found in the closets of our grave grandmothers many generations ago; and adopting all the spells and charms therein recorded, as invaluable cures for almost every disease under the sun. What we look upon as firm faith in one age, and believe to be such, we treat as the weakest folly in another, without in either case outraging reason, or bringing to the investigation an uncharitable spirit. For past credulity, a sigh or a smile are enough to mark our pity or censure, but to be partakers of the same belief are thoughts against which the common understanding rebels, even much as we may love the marvellous. A dream is not a miracle, nor the fulfilment of it a proof of the interference of the Almighty.

The young king had found favour in the eyes of the queen of East Anglia, and she reasoned with Redwald, and boldly showed him how base an act it would be, to give up their guest to the man who, having robbed him of his kingdom, now sought to take away his life. "A king should not violate his faith," said she, "for gold, for good faith is his noblest ornament." Redwald's heart seems ever to have guided him aright when he admitted not fear into the counsel, so he nobly resolved, instead of giving up his guest, to fight for him, and in place of basely selling his life, to win him back the province he had been driven from. And, after such a resolve, he doubtless felt himself more worthy of the title of the Bretwalda of Britain. We regret

that Time has not even spared us the name of this noble Saxon queen, that we might add one more woman to the list of these angelic immortalities, who stand like stars upon the brow of the deep midnight, that then hung so darkly above the clouded cliffs of Albion. When Redwald had once decided, he began to act; he waited not to be attacked, but, with such forces as he could muster, rushed at once to the boundary of the Deiri. He met Ethelfrith, ere he was wholly provided for his coming, on the banks of the river Idel, near Retford, in Nottinghamshire, at that time probably a portion of the kingdom he had wrested from Edwin. Redwald had his guest, his honour, and his kingdom to fight for: Edwin his life, and the possessions he inherited from his father—Ethelfrith, a long-cherished vengeance to appease—a kingdom he had seized upon without any one having before dared to dispute his claim—and East Anglia, now a fair prize, if he could but win it: he had a bad cause, yet not a doubt about obtaining the victory, for he had many a time driven the Picts and Scots, with whole hosts of the Cymry, banded together, before him, further to the north than any, excepting the Romans, had ever before done. His dreams had never been broken by the thought of a defeat, even when the monks of Bangor were praying against him; he conquered, and drove the British kings before him like withered leaves before a storm when the yellow Autumn is waning into Winter. No Christian fire had ever burnt upon his pagan altars—to Woden, the god of battles, had his sacrifices ever been offered up. Redwald, more vacillating, kept two altars in the temple in which he worshipped,—one dedicated to the grim idol which his warriors still believed in—the other where he at times knelt beside his fair queen, and sent up his wavering prayers, between the shrine of Woden, and the True God. No truer picture was probably ever drawn of the state of these truly pagan and half-Christian Saxons in the early times, than is here presented; that mingled fear of offending Woden, while the heart yearned for the love of Him whom they believed to be the Giver of all good, for God and good were in their language the same.

Before commencing the battle, Redwald divided his forces into three divisions; one of these he placed under the command of his son, Rainer, and the wing which the young prince headed, commenced the attack. Ethelfrith commanded his veteran forces to dash at once into the centre of the enemy's line; and so suddenly

and unexpectedly was this manœuvre accomplished, that it was like the instantaneous bursting of a thunder-storm down some steep hill side, covered over with the tall and yellow-waving corn of summer, through which the torrent and the tempest cut a path, for so was the division under prince Rainer dispersed, driven aside and cut asunder, that before the two bodies led on by Redwald and Edwin had time to wheel round, and check the force of that mighty avalanche, the prince was slain, and scarcely a warrior, who but a few moments before had charged so cheerfully under his war-cry, remained alive.

For a few moments the terrible tide of battle rolled backward, seeming to recoil from beneath the very force with which it had broken, as if the vanward waves but rushed again upon those that followed, to be driven on with greater might upon the desolated and wreck-strewn beach. Back again was the overwhelming tide borne with mightier force, and thrown off in a spray of blood from the points of ten thousand unflinching weapons, while Redwald himself, with lowering brow, and lip compressed, strode sullenly onward, and hewed his way into the very heart of the contest. Ethelfrith, outstripping his followers, rushed headlong into the very centre of the battle; the gap he had hewn with his own powerful arm closed behind him, and there stood between him and the remains of his army, an impenetrable wall of the enemy—where he fell, the last billow of the battle broke, for the companion waves had rolled out far to seaward, and only the shore over which they had broken was left, strewn over with the wrecks of the slain. Death had at last done his mighty work; and under his dark and awful banner Edwin had distinguished himself: those gloomy gates had opened the way to the kingdom from which he had so long been driven. Through the assistance of Redwald, he not only became the king of the Deira, but conquered the broad provinces of Bernicia, driving before him the sons of Ethelfrith, and sitting down sole king of Northumbria, for he united under his sway the kingdoms which Ida had governed, and Ella, his father, had won. Thus, the youth who had so long been a wanderer and an exile, who scarcely knew where to fly for shelter, who was ever in fear of his life, became at last the undisputed monarch of two mighty Saxon kingdoms, the Deira and Bernicia.

Edwin no sooner found himself firmly seated on the throne of Northumbria, than he sent into Kent, and solicited the hand of Edilburga in marriage. She was the daughter of the late Ethel-

bert, so distinguished for his kindness to the Christian missionaries. Probably Edwin had become acquainted with her while he wandered "homeless, amid a thousand homes." Her brother Eadbald had, by this time, become a Christian, had hurled down his heathen idols and pagan altars, and established himself beside the church at Canterbury, which had long been the metropolis of Kent. Eadbald justly argued, that it was wrong for a Christian maiden to become the wife of a pagan husband, of one who could neither share with her the holy sacrament, nor kneel down to worship before the altar of the same Holy God. Edwin bound himself by a solemn promise that he would offer no obstacle to the royal lady following her own faith, but that all who accompanied her, whether women, priests, or laymen, should have full liberty to follow their own form of religion; and that if, upon close examination by the wise and good men of his own faith, he found the Christian creed better than that of Odin, he might at last adopt it. The Saxon princess had the fullest confidence in the promise of the pagan king, and with a long train of noble and lowly attendants, headed by Paulinus, who was by this time created a bishop, she left the home of her fathers in Kent, and as Rowena had beforetime done, went to sojourn among strangers. Many a prayer was offered up by the way, and the holy rites of the church to which she belonged were daily celebrated. Timidly must the maiden's heart have beaten when she first set foot within that pagan land; but she probably remembered the time when many of her father's subjects were idolaters.

Nothing for the first year seems to have ruffled the smooth course of love between the pagan king and his Christian queen. Paulinus continued to preach, but made no converts; and the love of Edilburga, and the worship of Odin, went on together hand in hand; for though Edwin himself listened to the music of lips as sweet as those of Bertha, which had murmured conversion into the ears of Ethelbert, yet his creed remained unchanged. He loved, listened, and sighed, with his heathen faith still unshaken. It was at the holy time of Easter, while Edwin was seated in his palace beside the Derwent, that a messenger suddenly arrived from Cwichhelm, the pagan king of Wessex, and sought an audience, to make known his mission. He was, of course, admitted. While kneeling lowly to deliver his message, the stranger suddenly started up, drew forth a dagger which was concealed under his

dress, and was in the act of rushing upon the king, when Lilla, a thane in attendance, threw himself, in a moment, between the body of the monarch and the assassin—just in that brief interval of time which elapsed between the uplifting and the descending of the weapon; yet with such force was the deadly blow driven home, that the dagger passed clean through the body of Lilla, and slightly wounded the king. Although the swords of the attendants were instantly drawn, yet the assassin was not cut down until he had stabbed another knight with the dagger, which he had drawn from the body of the faithful thane who so nobly sacrificed his life to save that of the king. On the same evening, (it was Easter Sunday,) Edilburga was delivered of a daughter—the event probably hastened by the shock the murderer had occasioned. Edwin returned thanks to Odin for the birth of his child; and when Paulinus again drew his attention to the God who had so miraculously preserved his life, he promised he would follow the new faith which the bishop was so anxious to convert him to, if he was victorious over the king of Wessex, who had sent out his emissary to destroy him. Edwin further consented that his daughter should be baptized, as an earnest of his good faith. Several of his household were at the same time united to the Christian church.

The account of Edwin's campaign against the king of Wessex is so very vague and uncertain, that we are compelled to pass it over altogether. It appears, however, that he slew his enemy and returned home victorious—still he delayed his baptism, although he abandoned his idol-worship, and might often be seen sitting alone, as if holding serious communion with himself; still he was undecided whether or not to change his ancient faith. He also held long and frequent conversations with Paulinus, and had many serious discussions with his own nobles. He was even honoured with a letter from the pope, urging him to abandon his idols. Edilburga also received a letter from the same high authority, pointing out her duty, to do all that she could, by her intercession, to hasten his conversion; but Edwin still remained unchanged. The stormy halls of Odin and the boisterous revels in which the spirits of the departed warriors were ever supposed to partake, were more congenial to the martial hearts of the Saxons, than the peace, humility, and gentleness which clothed the Christian religion. A vision or a miracle is again called in by the venerable Bede to complete the

conversion of Edwin. This we shall pass over without openly expressing a feeling of doubt or disbelief. The means which the Almighty might take to bring about the conversion of a heathen nation are beyond the comprehension of man. We doubt not the light which fell upon and surrounded Saul, when breathing slaughter against the Christians whilst he was on his way to Damascus, for there we at once acknowledge the wonder-working hand of God. It required no such powerful agency for Paulinus to become acquainted with Edwin's previous dream. Nor does there appear to have been anything miraculous in the token which the king was reminded of; neither was the incident at all so startling as it first appears to be, for he had beyond doubt made Edilburga acquainted with the subject of his dream, and what would not a woman do, to accomplish the conversion of a husband she loved? Even after all, Edwin assembled his nobles and counsellors together openly, to discuss the new religion before he was baptized, for the vision or miracle had not yet dispelled his doubts.

When Edwin assembled his pagan priests and nobles together, and threw open before them the whole subject, Coifi, who had long administered the rites at the altar of Odin, and, as it appears, reaped but little benefit, thus spoke out, plainly and feelingly, at once. (We trust Edilburga was not present.) "You see, O King, what is now preached to us; I declare to you most truly, what I have most certainly experienced, that the religion which we have hitherto professed, contains no virtue at all, nor no utility. Not one of your whole court has been more attentive to the worship of your gods than myself, although many have received richer benefits, greater honours, and have prospered more than I have done. Now, if these gods had been of any real use, would they not have assisted me, instead of them? If, then, after due inquiry, you see that these 'new things' which they tell us of will be better, let us have them without any delay." Coifi was weary of waiting for the good things which stood ready prepared for him in the halls of Valhalla; he wanted to have a foretaste whilst living.

But we will leave plain-spoken Coifi to introduce the next orator, who was one of Nature's poets, though a pagan; and the passage is doubly endeared to us, by the knowledge that on a later day, Alfred the Great translated it, word for word, and letter for letter. We regret that we cannot give the original, for

there are many words in it which seem out of place, such as we believe the eloquent orator never uttered, although Bede lived about this time, and probably heard it from the lips of some one who was present when it was spoken. It ran nearly as follows: "The life of man while here, O King, seems to me, when I think of that life which is to come, and which we know not of, like a scene at one of your own winter feasts. When you sit in your hall, with the blaze of the fire in the midst of it, and round you your thanes and ealdermen, and the whole hall is bright with the warmth, and while storms of rain and snow are heard out in the cold air, in comes a small sparrow at one door, and flies round our feast; then it goes out another way into the cold. While it is in, it feels not the winter storm, but is warm, and feels a comfort while it stays; but when out in the winter cold, from whence it came, it goes far from our eyes. Such is here the life of man. It acts and thinks while here, but what it did when we saw it not, we do not know, nor do we know what it will do when it is gone." He then finished by adding something about the new religion, and prayed of them to adopt it, if it was more worthy of their belief, and opened clearer views respecting a future state than the old.

Paulinus was present, and when he had satisfactorily answered all questions, a fearful feeling still seemed to linger amongst the pagans, as to who should first desecrate their old temple, and overthrow the idols and altars before which they had so long worshipped. "Give me a horse and a spear," said Coifi, "and I will." They were brought to him. We cannot help picturing Coifi in his eagerness to get rid of the old religion, nor how Paulinus, with his dark hair, hooked nose, swarthy countenance, and darker eyes, just looked for a moment at Edwin, as the pagan priest hurled his spear at the idol temple, and profaned it. "The people without thought him mad." What Coifi thought of the people is not on record. He knew what the idols were better than they did. Witness the results of his own experience; for day after day, and year after year, had he administered to the shrine, yet received no reward; and doubtless Coifi thought that, let the new religion be what it might, it could not be worse than the old one. When he had hurled his spear against the temple, it was profaned, and could never more be dedicated to the worship of Odin; for such an act was held impious by the ancient Saxon pagans. The building was then destroyed, and

the surrounding enclosures levelled to the ground. This scene took place near the Derwent, not far from the spot where Edwin had so narrow an escape from the assassin Eumer. In Bede's time it was called Godmundham, or the home of the gods. After this, Edwin and his nobility were baptized, and through his persuasion, the son of his protector, Redwald, embraced Christianity, and diffused it amongst his subjects in East Anglia. Edwin himself, as we have shown, had in his younger days been a wanderer and an exile; and although we have no account of the privations he endured, they were doubtless great, and perhaps we should not much err in surmising that many a time he had endured the pangs of hunger and thirst: for on a later day he caused stakes to be fastened beside the highways wherever a clear spring was to be found, and to these posts, brazen dishes were chained, to enable the weary and thirsty traveller to refresh himself. For houses were then few and far apart, and the wayfarer had often to journey many a dreary league before he could obtain refreshment, as the monasteries were the only places in which he could halt and bait. In Edwin's reign, and through his kingdom, it is said that a woman with an infant at her breast might walk from the Tweed to the Trent without fearing injury from any one. He seems to have been beloved by all, and Edilburga ever moved beside him like a ministering angel.

But Edwin was not destined to go down peaceably to his grave; some quarrel arose between him and the son of his old Welsh host, Cadvan: what the cause was, we know not; it, however, led to a severe battle, and as it was fought near Morpeth, it is evident that the Welsh king was the invader. Edwin was, as usual, victorious, and chased Cadwallon into Wales. Some time after this event, there sprang up a renowned pagan warrior amongst the Saxons, named Penda, who governed the kingdom of Mercia, a portion of Britain that up to this period scarcely attracts the historian's attention. This Mercian king, Cadwallon prevailed upon to unite his forces with his own, and attack the Northumbrian monarch. The battle is believed to have taken place at Hatfield Chase, in Yorkshire, at the close of autumn in the year 633; in it king Edwin was slain, together with one of his sons, named Osfrid. Most of his army perished—a clear proof of the stern struggle they made to conquer. Cadwallon, and his ally, Penda, the pagan king, overran the united kingdoms of

Northumbria, desolating the Deiri and Bernicia in their march, and spreading terror wherever they appeared. Edilburga escaped with her children into Kent; Paulinus accompanied her, for the Christian churches appear to have been the chief objects which the Mercian monarch sought to destroy.

The world seemed to have no charms for Edilburga after the death of her royal husband. Her brother, Eadbald, the king of Kent, received her kindly and sorrowfully: the widowed queen, by his consent, built a monastery at Liming, and afterwards took the veil.

Such was the end of the beautiful daughter of Ethelbert,* she who when a girl had many a time seen Augustin at her father's court, and doubtless looked with childish wonder on the holy banner which the missionaries bore before them, whereon the image of the Blessed Redeemer was portrayed, when they first appeared in Kent. Upon the death of Edwin, the kingdom of Northumbria was again divided. Osric, a descendant of Ella, ascended the throne of the Deiri, and Eanfrid, the son of Ethelfrith, whom Edwin had driven into exile, reigned over Bernicia. Osric soon perished, for Cadwallon still continued his ravages, and while the king of Deiri was besieging a strong fortress which the Welsh monarch occupied, an unexpected sally was made, and in the skirmish Osric was slain. Eanfrid met with a less glorious death, for while within the camp of Cadwallon, suing for peace, he was, even against all the acknowledged laws of that barbarous age, put to death. This Welsh king appears to have been as great a scourge to the Saxons as ever king Arthur was in his day, nor does his old ally, Penda, seem to have been a jot less sparing of his own countrymen;—but his doings will form the subject of our next chapter.

In fourteen battles and sixty skirmishes is Cadwallon said to have fought, and so odious was the last year in which he distinguished himself—so blotted by his ravages and the apostasy of many of the Saxon kings, that Bede says, the annalists, by one consent, refused to record the reigns of these renegades, so added it to the sovereignty of Oswald. The most important event that we have to record in his reign was the victory he obtained over Cadwallon, which occurred soon after he was seated upon the throne of Bernicia. Oswald was already celebrated for his piety, and previous to his battle with the Welsh king, he planted the image of the cross upon the field, holding it with his own hands, while

his soldiers filled up the hollow which they had made in the earth to receive it. When the cross was firmly secured, he exclaimed, "Let us all bend our knees, and with one heart and voice pray to the True and the Living God, that He in His mercy will defend us from a proud and cruel enemy: for to Him it is known that we have commenced this war, for the salvation and safety of our people." All knelt, as he had commanded, around the cross, and when the last murmur of the solemn prayer had died away, they marched onward with stouter hearts to meet the terrible enemy. Of the battle we have scarcely any other record than that which briefly relates the death of Cadwallon and the destruction of his army. The spot in which the cross was planted was called "Heaven-field," and was for ages after held in great reverence. But neither the piety of Oswald, nor his victory over the Welsh king, could protect him from the wrath of Penda: and the scene of our history now shifts to the kingdom of Mercia, which, up to this time, had seemed to sleep in the centre of the Saxon dominions: for those who had settled down in the midland districts had, with the exception of Crida, scarcely left so much as a name behind, and he is only known as the grandfather of Penda. To the deeds of the latter we have now arrived, and he who assisted to slay five kings, is the next stormy spirit that throws its shadow upon our pages.

CHAPTER XIV.

PENDA, THE PAGAN MONARCH OF MERCIA.

"The gates of mercy shall be all shut up :
 And the fleshed soldier,—rough and hard of heart,—
 In liberty of bloody hand, shall range
 With conscience wide as hell: mowing like grass
 Your fresh fair virgins and your flowering infants."

SHAKSPEARE.

HITHERTO the kingdom of Mercia has scarcely arrested our attention, but the time at last came when it was destined to rise with a startling distinctiveness above the rest of the Saxon states, under the sovereignty of Penda. As the midland counties bor-

dered upon the Deiri, it is not improbable that Mercia had been subject to the sway of the more northern monarchs, until the grandson of Crida appeared, and, struck by its fallen state, resolved at once to raise it to its true dignity. We have seen him before figure in the battle where he joined Cadwallon, and overthrew the once-powerful Edwin; then he gained but an empty victory, he now resolved to retrace his steps and reap a more substantial harvest or perish in the attempt. Above sixty years had already rolled over his head, yet for military skill and talent he had scarcely an equal, and when, ten years before, he was crowned king of Mercia, many foresaw that his would be a terrible reign; he had linked himself with the British—daringly thrown down his gauntlet and challenged all comers; no one was found bold enough to pick it up. Wherever he appeared, Mercy fled with a shiver, and Hope placed her fair hands before her eyes to weep: from step to step did he advance as he grew grey in crime, still glorying in the hoariness of his iniquities. Bold, ambitious, and cruel, he sought out danger wherever it was to be found, and attacked Power in the very heart of his stronghold; he knew only Mercy by the name of Death, nor shunned he the fate to which he consigned others. He hated not the Christians who adhered rigidly to the tenets of their new creed, but if they halted between two opinions, he abhorred them; while on his part he worshipped Odin, and never left the altars of his grim war-god dry for want of a victim. Endowed with a strong and fearless mind, and a body that age only seemed to harden, he led the way from battle to battle, and victory to victory, while the neighbouring kings looked on and trembled. No marvel that such a conqueror found ready allies amongst the Cymry, or that they were ever eager to join him when he required their aid, while he in return seems to have stood ready armed for any cause, that might chance to fall in his way, and but for his assistance to Cadwallon, Edwin might probably have died an old man in his bed, with Edilburga and his children kneeling beside him. But ambition was the rock on which nearly all these ancient kings were wrecked; the open ocean was not wide enough for them; wherever it was rumoured that danger lurked, there they at once steered—they deemed it but cowardly to wait for the coming of death, so seized the helm and sailed boldly out to look for his dark dominions. To be chained to the domestic

hearth was to them a misery, the bark of the old hound, and the recognising flutter of the familiar hawk, and the prattle of children became weary! weary! Old household affections but palled; Edilburga might smile, and Paulinus pray, but the tramp of the war-horse, and the ringing of the sword upon the buckler, and the clang of the battle-axe, as it cleaved its way through helmet and armour, were sweeter sounds than these; the spirit within but yearned for the sleep which was purchased by a dearly won victory; even the eyes of grey-headed old men brightened when the contest was talked over in which they had fought, and they went out of the hall, tottering at every step, to bask in the sunshine, and sigh over the deeds done in those "good old times." Wearisome was the morning light to their eyes, which dawned not upon the tented field; they loved better to see the banner of the red dragon of the Britons waving upon some distant height, opposite to which their own standard of the white horse fluttered, than to watch the motion of the trees, or the rustle of the yellow corn, or to hear the bleating and the lowing of "the cattle upon a thousand hills:" to such belonged Penda, the ruler of Mercia.

Whether the death of Cadwallon, the British king, with whom Penda's forces were allied when Edwin was defeated at the battle of Hatfield-chase, caused the Mercian monarch to invade Bernicia, to revenge his fall and defeat, or whether the love of conquest alone induced Penda to undertake this expedition, is not recorded, neither is it clearly made out that he was not present at the battle in which Cadwallon was slain. Whatever were his motives, he attacked and slew Oswald, without any apparent cause of quarrel, and in him perished one of the best of the Northern kings. It is said that while the barbed javelin which caused his death was still fixed in his breast, he never for a moment ceased to pray; and that for centuries after his death his name was ever linked with the following pious sentence: "May the Lord have mercy on their souls! as Oswald said, when he fell on the battle-field." It is also recorded of Oswald that one day, as he was about to partake of the refreshments which were placed before him in a silver dish, the almoner, whose office it was to relieve the poor, stepped in and informed him that a number of beggars were waiting without soliciting alms:—when his eye alighted upon the rich vessel in which the dainties were piled, the thoughts of their wants, and his own unnecessary luxuries, rose before him with so striking

a contrast, that he ordered the untouched food to be distributed amongst the beggars, and the silver dish to be broken up and given to them; yet Penda caused the head and limbs of this pious and charitable king to be severed from the body, trans-fixed on stakes, and exposed to the public gaze. He then marched through Northumbria, spreading death and desolation wherever he trod; attacked the castle of Bamborough, and, unable to carry it by storm, demolished all the buildings in the neighbourhood, and piled up the wood and thatch around the strong fortress, and then set fire to the ruins he had heaped together. Fortunately for the besieged, the wind changed just as the flames began to rise, and the eddying gust blew back the blazing ruins upon the besiegers. Penda then turned his back upon Northumbria, and we next meet with him in Wessex, where he makes war upon Cenwalch, for some insult the latter had offered to Penda's sister; Cenwalch is driven out of his kingdom, remains in exile three years, and then returns, having doubtless reconciled himself to the Mercian king. When he had finished his work in Wessex, and Sigebert had resigned his crown, he directed his steps to East Anglia, for Redwald had long since slept with his fathers: he had also founded a school, from which it is not improbable the present University of Cambridge sprung; and having given his kingdom to his kinsman Ecgric, and built a monastery, into which he at last retired, he had long since taken a farewell of all his greatness. But Sigebert had been renowned in his day; and now danger was knocking at the door, the East Anglians were unwilling that an old warrior should be pattering his prayers when he ought to be wielding his battle-axe; and it is recorded that his former subjects drew him forcibly out of the monastery, and compelled him to lead them on against Penda. With only a white wand in his hand, and probably robed in his monkish habiliments, the old soldier took the command of the battle; his religious scruples, however, preventing him from using any warlike weapon. We can almost picture him, pale with his ascetic life, for no one had adhered more rigidly to the monastic rules than he had done, standing with his white wand uplifted amid a throng of warriors, pointing to the most salient points of the opposing army, with a martial glimmer just lighting up for a moment the cold grey eye, which for years had only contemplated that glory which he hoped to enjoy beyond the grave. We can imagine the sudden contrast of sounds—from

the low muttered prayer, or the holy hymns chaunted within the walls of his monastery, to the shout, the rush, the struggle, and the clanging of arms. Nor is it difficult to picture the look of contempt with which the pagan king Penda would gaze upon his ghostly opponent, or to imagine the bitter jeers to which the hardened heathen would give utterance as he wiped his bloody battle-axe, and gazed upon the monk-king and his crowned kinsman, as they lay together amid the slain—for both Sigebert and Ecgric fell, and their whole army was routed or slaughtered by the hitherto invincible Penda.

Anna succeeded Ecgric, and Sigebert; but scarcely was he seated upon the perilous throne of East Anglia, before the pagan warrior again made his appearance; for although Penda was now an old man, grey-headed, and eighty years of age, he could no more live without fighting than he could without food. Anna had been guilty of sheltering Cenwalch, the king of Wessex, after Penda had dethroned him; an unpardonable offence in the eyes of the hoary old heathen; so he marched once more into East Anglia, and slew him. He had by this time sent five kings and thousands of their followers as offerings to Odin, and not yet satisfied, he resolved once more to visit the northern kingdoms, for the pleasant vallies which stretched on either side the Trent had no charms for Penda. The "thirty-armed river," as Milton has called it, could not retain him within its boundaries; he liked not the air of our midland counties, so set off to pay another visit to the Deiri or Bernicia, with every mile of which he was doubtless familiar. He had grown grey in fighting battles, had been a king thirty years, and during the whole period was either preparing to attack, marching, or fighting. The old chroniclers compare him to a vulture, a wild beast, ravenous for prey, and one whose chief delight was in the clashing of arms, and the shedding of human blood.

After having slain Oswald and brutally exhibited his remains, he appears to have paid frequent visits to Oswy, who succeeded him. But Oswy had no disposition to fight, and therefore enedavoured to keep the quarrelsome old Mercian quiet by exhausting the Northumbrian treasury. Growling like a tiger, Penda refused to accept all the treasures he could heap together; he was neither to be bought over by gold nor prayers; he came to fight, and fight he would; he seemed like a drunken man who is de-

terminated to quarrel, even if he has to run his head against the first post he meets with. He had come, he said, to extirpate the whole race of the Northumbrians—the Deiri, Bernicia, and all—he came to kill.

When Oswy found that all entreaties were in vain, he mustered his forces together, which were far inferior to Penda's in number. Before commencing the battle, Oswy vowed, like Jephthah of old, that if he obtained the victory, he would dedicate his daughter to the service of the Lord; and having formed this resolution, he issued forth to meet the mighty man-slayer, who had hitherto scarcely sustained a single defeat. The Northumbrian, with a heavy heart, divided the command of his little army between himself and his son Alfred. The battle took place somewhere in Yorkshire, but where cannot now with certainty be pointed out; it was in the neighbourhood of a river, and not far distant from York. The contest was terrible; the army under the command of Penda appears to have been made up of Britons and Saxons, some of whom were dragged reluctantly into the battle, and but waited the first favourable moment to turn their arms against the dreaded chieftain. The low land in the rear of Penda's army was flooded; beyond, the deep-swollen river was already roaring as if in expectation of its prey. Penda charged as usual—hot, eager, and impetuous, as if the victory was already his own; but the old man's arms were not so strong as they had been,—he could not see his way so clearly as he had done beforetime. Odilwald, who occupied a favourable position, had not yet stirred a step. It seems as if one portion of Penda's mighty force was jealous of another; there was the river roaring behind, and Oswy bearing down upon them before. Midway all was confusion, and in the midst of it stood Penda, blinded with fury, and bleeding from his wounds. Over the dying and the dead trampled the victorious army of Oswy. Over Penda they trod, who lay upon the ground a hideous mass, his grey head cloven open by a blow from a battle-axe. None paused to survey him. Before the Northumbrians the routed host rushed onward, onward, until the ringing of armour, and the clashing of blade upon blade, sunk into a gurggle, and a moan, and a splash; and still the river tore on its way, as if in haste to make room for more. Downward the defeated plunged, into deep beds, where the hungry pike slept, and the slimy eel lay coiled. The flooded fields were manured

with the dead; hideous sights which many a rich harvest has since covered; the river-bed was clogged up with the bodies of the slain, which fishes fed upon, and winter rains at last washed away—rich relics to pave the floor of that gloomy hall, where Hela the terrible reigned. If ever there was a clattering of skulls in Valhalla it was then; or if Odin ever rushed out with open arms, to meet the bloodiest of his worshippers, it was when the soul of Penda came. What a crimson country is ours! what rivers of gore has it taken to make our green England what it is! No marvel that even the rims of our daisies are dyed crimson by contact with such a sanguinary soil.

Oswy, after this unexpected victory, now overran Mercia, and subjected it to his sway. His daughter Alchflæda he also gave in marriage to Peada, the son of Penda, and installed him in his father's kingdom, on condition that he should introduce Christianity into his dominions. Alfred, the son of Oswy, in return married the daughter of Penda, whose name was Cyneburga. Thus on each side a pagan was united to a Christian, and the work of conversion went on prosperously; for there were now but few corners of the British dominions in which the true faith was not introduced. Such changes were enough to make the stern old Saxon heathen leap out of his grave. In his lifetime no one would have been found bold enough to have proposed them. Alchflæda's mother was still living, and remained a firm follower of the old idolatrous creed; she seems to have accompanied her daughter into Mercia, and had doubtless in her train many a grey old veteran, who still bowed the knee before the altars of Odin, and who looked upon a religion which taught peace, good will, and charity to all mankind, with disdain. It is not clearly made out by whose instigation Peada was assassinated. Both his wife and her mother stand accused of the deed, but no cause is assigned for the former perpetrating so dreadful a crime; nor can any other reason be assigned for the latter having done it, beyond what we have given. Peada, however, fell at the holy time of Easter, which seems to have been a favourite season for assassination amongst the pagan Saxons, in proof of which numerous instances might be quoted. Before his death, Peada commenced the famous monastery of Peterborough, which his brother Wulfhere completed. Nor was Wulfhere content with only finishing the minster, for he gave to the Abbot Saxulf, to the monks, and their successors for ever, all the lands and waters, meads, fens,

and weirs, which lay for many miles around it, and covered in extent what forms more than one English shire. Wulfhere, like Sigebert, appears to have been as much of a monk as a warrior, though a little of old Penda's blood still flowed in his veins; and when Cenwalch, of Wessex, who had been humbled and disgraced by Penda, resolved to have his revenge upon the son, although he was at first successful, the Mercians at last became conquerors, and Cenwalch was again exiled, and his kingdom fell into the hands of the Mercian sovereign.

The king of Essex, about this time, made frequent visits to Oswy's court, and the Northumbrian sovereign lost no opportunity of dissuading him from following his idol worship. The arguments Oswy used, though simple, were convincing; he told him that such objects as were fashioned out of stone or wood, and which the axe or the fire could so readily destroy and consume, could not contain a Godhead. Such reasoning had the desired effect, and the king of Essex, together with numbers of his subjects, abandoned their pagan belief. The sovereign of Sussex was also converted through the instrumentality of Wulfhere, who was as eager to spread the doctrines of Christianity as his father had ever been to uphold the worship of Woden. Cenwalch, the king of Wessex, who, like so many others about this period, keeps crossing the busy stage at intervals, only to fill up the scenes, at length died, but whether in exile or not is uncertain. Saxburga, the widowed queen, stepped into the vacant throne; but the Wessex nobles refused to be governed by a woman, although she wielded the sceptre with a firmer hand, and ruled the kingdom better than her husband had ever done; strengthening her forces, and ever holding herself in readiness in case of an invasion. Still there was ever some one amongst her nobles who shared her rule; and one of these, a descendant from the renowned Cerdric, led her forces against the king of Mercia. Essex was at this time under the sway of Wulfhere, and it is likely enough that he looked with a jealous eye upon the bold front which Saxburga's kingdom presented, after the death of Cenwalch, who had been so frequently conquered. A battle was fought in Wiltshire, in which neither party appear to have reaped any material advantage; and in little more than a year after the contest, both the leaders were in their graves. Oswy, the conqueror of Penda, had before this died, and his son Ecgfrid became the king of Northumbria, in which

the Deiri and Bernicia were now united. Alfred, who had married Penda's daughter, after having aided in destroying her father and his powerful army, at the battle in Yorkshire, was not allowed to succeed Oswy, on account of some flaw in his birth. Nearly all beside, of any note, who figured in this busy period, had passed away, excepting the last son of Penda, named Ethelred, who, after the death of Wulfhere, ascended the Mercian throne. Ecgfrid fell in a battle against the Picts, though not before he had invaded Mercia, for although Ethelred had married his sister, it seemed as if the hostile blood which had so long flowed between the sons, Oswy and Penda, was not to be blended by marriage. The archbishop Theodore stepped in between the combatants, and healed up the breach long before Ecgfrid perished. About this time, also, died Cadwaladyr, the last of the Cymry who aspired to the sovereignty of Britain. His death was the cause of a battle being fought. Similar unimportant events make up the catalogue which closes the account of this period. The Saxon kingdoms seemed to stand upon an ever-moving earthquake: one was swallowed to-day, and cast up again on the morrow: the earth was ever rocking and reeling: kings came and went, as the images shift in a kaleidoscope. If one year saw a sovereign victorious, the next beheld him dethroned and an exile; he put on his crown, or laid it aside, just as his more powerful neighbour bade him. When fortune placed him uppermost, he retaliated in the same way on his former conqueror. Still we have before us the stirring times of Offa the Terrible; Egbert and Ethelwulf followed by the stormy sea-kings, whose invasions were more merciless than those of the Saxons; for the history of this period is like an ocean studded with islands, some of which lie near together, others wide apart; and many which, from the distance, seem to have a barren and forbidding look, are, on a nearer approach, found rich in ancient remains; and though now silent and desolate, we discover in what is left behind traces of the once mighty inhabitants, that ages ago have passed away. Such is the history of the early Saxon kingdoms. Where an idle voyager would yawn and grow weary, his intelligent companion would linger, and gaze, and ponder in silent wonder and reverential awe.

CHAPTER XV.

DECLINE OF THE SAXON OCTARCHY.

“ Let us sit upon the ground,
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings :—
 How some have been deposed, some slain in war ;
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed ;
 Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed ;
 All murdered :—For within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king,
 Keeps Death his court.”—SHAKSPERE.

THE remainder of our journey through the kingdoms which anciently formed the Saxon Octarchy now lies in a more direct road, where there are fewer of those perplexing paths and winding ways, such as we have hitherto been compelled to thread, in our difficult course through this dimly-discovered country of the Past. We are now on the sun-bright borders of those dark old forest fastnesses, amid which we could scarcely see what flowers were at our feet, or catch a clear glimpse of the outstretched sky that hung above our heads; a few steps from this, and we leave this land of twilight and uncertain shadows behind. After the death of Ecgfrid, Alfred, who is already distinguished as having fought in the battle in which Penda fell, and afterwards, as having married his daughter, ascended the throne of Northumbria. We have before shown how, on account of his birth, his succession was disputed by the nobles; against their decision he offered neither defence nor resistance, but betaking himself to study, he so enriched his mind, under the instruction of the famous Bishop Wilfrid, that Bede classes him as first amongst the kings of Anglo-Saxons for his literary acquirements. He “waded not through slaughter to a throne,” but calmly abided his time, and when it came, quitted his study to sway the sceptre. His court was the resort of literary men and enlightened travellers, and Aldhelm, the celebrated scholar of that day, stood high in his favour. There was a firmness about his character worthy of the name which afterwards becomes so endeared to us, for when he could not conscientiously agree in certain matters with his old tutor, Wilfrid, he allowed the bishop to quit his dominions,

nor had a letter from the Pope influence enough to alter his resolution. Nothing of note appears to have occurred in Northumbria during his reign, for the expulsion of Eadwulf, and the ascension of Osred, were accomplished without difficulty. Ceolwulf came next, to whom Bede dedicated his Ecclesiastical History; but we must not step too suddenly into the familiar light which seems all at once about to break upon us.

Ceadwalla, a descendant of the renowned Cerdric's, after the death of Ecgfrid, made a stand against the nobles of Wessex, who had banished him from that kingdom. He first attacked the king of Sussex, slew him, and desolated his dominions. He then, accompanied by his brother Mollo, made an inroad into Kent, where they ravaged and destroyed the towns and villages for miles around. While Mollo, with several of his soldiers, were busied in plundering a house, they were surrounded by the enraged men of Kent, who, preventing the escape of the marauders, set fire to the building on every side, and burnt all within alive. The king of Wessex revenged his brother's death, and, far and wide, around the scene of this terrible sacrifice, he made "a land of mourning." After this he went on a pilgrimage to Rome, was baptized by the Pope, and died the week after.

Ina then ascended the throne of Wessex; his celebrated laws are still in existence, and as they throw considerable light upon the manners of this remote period, we will take a hasty glance at them before proceeding further. If a child was not baptized within thirty days after its birth, a penalty of thirty shillings was demanded; if that period elapsed and the ceremony was still neglected, the priest or the parents must forfeit all they possessed. If a slave or theow worked on Sunday by his master's commands, he became free; if a freeman worked on that day, by his own consent, he forfeited his freedom. If any one sold his servant, whether a slave or a freeman, he must pay his full value. If a poor man died, and left his wife with a child, six shillings a-year was to be paid for its maintenance, together with a cow in the summer, and an ox in winter—its kindred was to take charge of the house until the child became of age. If a man was killed, his life was valued according to what he was worth, and the slayer had to pay a fixed price for his death. Crude as these laws are, and barbarous as they prove the people to have been for which they were made, still they are the

first landmarks, reared in a wild and uncivilized country, which point out to man the extent of his possessions and his power; the first attempt to draw an even line between might and right; for here the poor theow, the slave of the soil, he who was sold, like the cattle upon the estate, to the next purchaser, felt secure within his allotted mark. The day of holy rest was his own; if his lord compelled him to labour, the laws of Ina, next day, made him a free man. Ina, like his predecessors, was compelled to fight his way to peace, and amid his hostilities, he became involved in a war with Ceolred, king of Mercia. His queen appears to have been as courageous as himself, and is said to have besieged one of her husband's enemies at Taunton, and to have levelled the castle in which he was sheltered to the ground. Ina rebuilt the abbey of Glastonbury, and endowed it with rich gifts. It seems to have grown a custom amongst the Saxon kings at this period, to go on pilgrimage to Rome, resign their crowns, and become monks. Ina's queen had long tried, but in vain, to induce her husband to follow what she considered such worthy examples; but her entreaties had hitherto proved useless. She at last hit upon the following device. A feast had been held in one of Ina's castles; and the morning after the banquet they went out together to ride; when they returned, she conducted Ina into the banqueting hall, which was now covered with filth, and occupied by a herd of swine, a litter of which was resting upon the very couch he had before occupied. Well might so sudden a change astonish him, and we can readily imagine the dark spot that gathered upon his angry brow. Such a mode of conversion would have startled either Augustin or Paulinus, and made even cunning Coifi pause before he changed his opinion. The queen pleaded guilty to the fault, and reasoned upon the matter as follows: "My lord," said she, "this is very different from the noise and hilarity of yesterday; there are no brilliant hangings now; no table weighed down with silver vessels, no delicacies to delight the palate, neither flatterers nor parasites—all these have vanished like the smoke before the wind—have all passed away into nothingness. Ought we not, then, to feel alarmed, who covet them so much, yet are everyway as transient? Are not all such things so? and are we not ourselves like a river, that hurries headlong and heedlessly along to the dark and illimitable ocean of time? Unhappy must we ever be if we let such things occupy our minds. Think, I

entreat you, how disgusting those things become of which we are so enamoured; and see what filthy objects we have become attached to; for in those filthy relics we may see what our pampered bodies will at last become. Oh! let us reflect, that the greater we have been, and the more powerful we now are, the more alarmed we ought to be, for the greater will be the punishment of our misconduct."

Ina listened, sighed, resigned his crown, and set off for Rome, where he founded a school, and imposed a tax of a penny upon every family in his kingdom, which was called Romescot, and which went to support the institution he had raised. As a proof of his sincerity, he wore a common dress, lived meanly, cut his hair, laboured hard, and dwelt in retirement with his queen, until he died "a good old man." His brother, Inigils, had died a few years before him, a name that falls silent as snow upon the pages of History; yet like the snow, doing its silent work, for he must have been a man of some note in his day and generation, to have been the father of Egbert and the grandfather of Alfred the Great, from whom descended a long line of kings.

The Mercian nobles rose up and put to death Ostrida, the wife of Ethelred their king, for what cause history is altogether silent; neither the why nor the wherefore is given—the sentence reads in the Saxon Chronicle like an epitaph upon a grave-stone, yet she was the daughter of the once powerful Oswy of Northumbria, and when destroyed, queen of the Mercians. The very mystery which hangs around her fate interests us, and we want to know something about what she had done to draw down such dreadful punishment, but all our inquiries are vain; beyond the mere entry of her violent death, not even a doubt is registered, for us to pause over. The deed was done, and is recorded in one brief, terrible sentence, and we know no more. Her husband, Ethelred, abandoned the crown of Mercia to his nephew Cenred, and entered the monastery of Bardney, as a monk, going through all the routine of common duties, like a humble brother, until at last he rose to the rank of abbot in the monastery which he himself had founded.

Ethelbald is the next king of Mercia who commands our attention. He had been nursed in the stern school of privation; like Edwin of Northumbria, he had been persecuted in his youth, and owed his life to Guthlac, the hermit of Croyland. Picture the warrior monk and the young king in those wild marshes—

where no monastery was as yet built up, and where, upon that swamp, which was afterwards crowned with a splendid abbey, only a humble hut, and a rude cross of wood, were then to be seen. The stormy old warrior, Guthlac, who had done battle in many a hard-fought field, was at last weary of a soldier's life, and hearing that there was an island surrounded by a lake in a corner of Mercia, he got one of the rude Lincolnshire fishermen to row him to the spot, where for some time he remained alone; here he was visited by Ethelbald, a man elegant in form, with a frame of iron, and a bold, undaunted spirit. There must have been some strange charm in the society of the soldier-monk, thus to have won over the young king to share with him such a solitude, for the marshes of Croyland must in those days have worn a most forbidding appearance, and even now, as they wave in summer, with their dark, coarse patches of goose-grass, and in some places, no stir of life is seen, excepting where the gosherd drives before him his noisy flock, an air of melancholy reigns over the scenery, and the mind unconsciously wanders back among the shadows of the dead. Nor did Ethelbald, when he ascended the throne of Mercia, forget his exile, or his companion Guthlac, but gave the island of Croyland to the monks who had accompanied his friend, and preserved their piety amid all the privations which surrounded that solitude, and over the monument which the Mercian king erected to the monk, was afterwards built the monastery of Croyland.

Ethelbald conquered Northumbria, and, aided by Cuthred, king of Wessex, obtained a victory over the Welsh; but although they had thus fought side by side, a spirit of jealousy lurked within each bosom, and the Wessex king only waited for the first favourable opportunity to throw off the mask, and free himself from the power of the Mercian monarch. Unforeseen circumstances, for some time, prevented Cuthred from openly taking the field against Ethelbald; his son rose up in rebellion, and no sooner was he put down, than one of his nobles, named Edelhun, took up arms, and would have conquered Cuthred, had he not been wounded at the very time when the battle had turned in his favour. These rebellions Ethelbald is accused of having fomented. The rival kings at last met near Burford in Oxfordshire; Ethelbald had under his command the combined forces of Essex, Kent, East Anglia, and Mercia; Cuthred, the soldiers of Wessex alone, and the powerful arm of the former rebel,

Edeldun, who was now his friend. From Roger de Wendover, we, with a few slight alterations, copy the following description of the battle, as being one of the most picturesque accounts which we have met with in the pages of the early historians.

“The attack on each side was headed by the standard-bearers of the opposing king; Edeldun bore the banner of Wessex, on which was emblazoned a golden dragon, and rushing forward with the ensign in his hand, he struck down the Mercian standard-bearer, a daring deed which called forth a loud shout from the army of Cuthred. A moment after, and the noise was drowned by the clashing of weapons, the mingled din, and roaring, and shouting, which swelled into the prolonged thunder of battle, amid which, if a brief pause intervened, it was filled up by the shrieks and groans of the wounded and the dying, or the falling of some dreaded instrument which terminated the agony of death. Havoc spread like the destroying flames, into the midst of which the maddened masses plunged. Death and danger were disregarded; they fought as if the fate of a kingdom rested upon the blows dealt by each single arm. For a moment the sunlight fell upon a mass of dazzling armour, gilding the plumed helmet, the pointed spear, the uplifted sword, and broad-edged battle-axe, and the rich banner, which, as it was borne onward amid the hurried charge, fluttered in gaudy colours, high over the heads of the eager combatants; a few moments more, and all this brave array was broken; another moving mass rushed onward in the thickest of the strife, the banner rocked and swayed, then went down; point after point the uplifted spears rose and sank, the helmets seemed as if crowded together; then the space which they occupied was filled up by others who passed onward, the moving waves heaved and fell, and passed along, while over all rolled that terrible sea of death which had swallowed up horse, rider, banner, sword, and battle-axe. Foremost in the ranks, stood Edeldun; wherever he moved, the spot was marked by the rapid circles which his ponderous battle-axe made around his head. At every stroke, death descended; wherever that terrible edge alighted, the hollow earth groaned, as it made room for another grave; no armour was proof against the blows which he dealt, for the fall of his arm was like that of a dreaded thunder-bolt that rives asunder whatever it strikes. Like two consuming fires, each having set in from opposite quarters and destroyed all that lay in their path, so did Edeldun and Ethelbald at last

meet, flame hurrying to flame, nothing left between to consume; behind each lay a dead, desolated, and blackened pathway." Here we are compelled to halt; the sternest image we could gather from the pages of Homer, would still leave the idea of their meeting imperfect. Ethelbald fled, having first exchanged a few blows with his dreaded adversary. Wessex shook off the Mercian yoke, and Ethelbald never again raised his head so high as it had before been, when he looked proudly above those of the surrounding kings. Cuthred died, and the king of Mercia was soon after slain in a civil war in his own dominions. After his death, our attention is riveted upon the events which took place between these rival kingdoms, for the rest of the Saxon states, with scarcely an exception, were soon swallowed up in that great vortex, which at last bore the immortal name of England.

After the death of Cuthred, the throne of Wessex was occupied by Sigebyhrt, whose reign was brief and unpopular; he paid no regard to the laws which had been established by Ina; he took no heed of the remonstrances of his subjects, but when Cumbra, one of the most renowned of their nobles, boldly proclaimed the grievances of the people, he was put to death. This was the signal for a revolt—the nobles assembled, the people were summoned to the council, and Sigebyhrt was deposed. Fearful of the vengeance of his subjects, the exiled king fled into the wild forest of Andredswold, where he concealed himself amid its gloomy thickets. Here it is probable that for a time the rude peasantry supplied him with food, and that the wild man of the wood was the whole talk and wonder of the neighbouring foresters. One day, however, he was met by a swineherd named Ansiam, who had doubtless seen him beforetime when he visited his murdered master Cumbra—the swineherd knew him at the first glance, and although he did not kill the king on the spot, yet he waited his time, and revenged his master's death by stabbing Sigebyhrt to the heart. He appears to have watched him to his hiding-place, and when the fallen king lay stretched upon his couch of leaves, under the shade of gloomy and overhanging boughs, the savage swineherd stole silently through the thicket, and with one blow sent the unhappy sovereign to sleep his last sleep. As in the death of queen Ostrida, we find but a brief entry of his terrible ending in the old chronicles; he suited them not, was slain, cast aside, and so made

room for another, and Cynewulf, in whose veins the blood of Woden was believed to flow, reigned in his stead.

We will now hasten on and make a brief survey of the state of Northumbria. Ceolwulf, the patron of Bede, resigned his crown for the quietude of the cloister. Eadburt succeeded to the vacant throne. Whilst he was warring with the Picts, his dominions were invaded by the Mercians; he reigned for twenty-three years, then retired to a monastery, making the eighth Saxon king who had voluntarily laid aside the crown for the cowl. It is said that the fate of Sigebyrht and the fall of Ethelbald caused him to contrast their turbulent ending with the peaceful death-bed of Ceolwulf—a strange change was thus wrought in the minds of these old Saxon kings—the glory of Woden had departed; no eager guests now rushed to the banquetting-halls of Valhalla; they looked for other glories beyond the grave. Osulf succeeded his father to the throne of Northumbria, scarcely reigned a year, and was treacherously slain. Taking no warning by his fate, Edelwold was bold enough to accept the crown; as usual, the path from the throne to the tomb was but a brief step, and he perished. Another and another still succeeded. Alred, a descendant of Ida, stepped into the empty seat, just looked around, and was driven out of the kingdom. Then Ethelred came, put two of his generals to death on the evidence of two others, when, a few months after, the accusers turned round upon him, conquered him, and drove him from the throne. He fled like Alred. Alfwold was the next king that came to be killed; he just reigned long enough to leave his name behind before he bade the world “good night.” Osred next mounted, made his bow, was asked to sit down, then driven out. Ethelred was beckoned back again; he came, stabbed Eardulf, who had aspired to the crown, and left him bleeding at the gate of a monastery; dragged the children of Alfwold from York, and slaughtered them; put to death Osred, who, like himself, had been deposed, and just when he thought he had cleared away every obstacle, and was about to sit down upon the throne which he had stuffed with the dead to make it more easy, his subjects rewarded him for what he had done by slaying him. He was followed by Osbald, who sat trembling with the crown upon his head for twenty-seven days, but not having reigned long enough to merit death, he was permitted to retire into a cloister. Eardulf, whom we left bleeding at the

gates of the monastery, was taken in and cured by the monks, fled to Rome, was received by Charlemagne, and at last placed upon the throne of Northumbria, where he had not sat long before his subjects revolted. The crown and sceptre of Northumberland were then thrown aside—men shunned them as they would have done a plague; the curse of death was upon them, no man could take them up and live. “Death kept his court” within the one, and when he wielded the other, the gold had ever pointed either to the grave or the cloister. From such a murderous court numbers of the nobles and bishops fled—the throne stood vacant for several years; no man was found bold enough to occupy it. The sword which ever hung there had fallen too often—not another Damocles could be found to ascend and survey the surrounding splendour from such a perilous position.

In looking over this long list of natural deaths, murders, and escapes which took place in one kingdom after the abdication of Eadbert, we have but recorded the events which occurred within forty short years, from seven hundred and fifty-seven to about seven hundred and ninety. From the landing of Hengist and Horsa, about three centuries before, nearly one hundred and fifty kings had sat upon the different thrones of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The bulk of these are unknown to us excepting by name; we can with difficulty just make out the petty states they reigned over, and that is nearly all. Some died in the full belief of their heathen creed, with a firm faith that from a death-bed in the field of battle to the brutal immortality which their bloody deeds had merited was but a step, and that their happiness hereafter would consist in feasting and holiday murders in the halls of Woden. Others calmly breathed their last with their dying eyes fixed upon the cross of Christ, while the anchor of their faith sunk noiselessly into the deep sea of death, and their weary barques were safely moored in that tranquil harbour where neither waves beat nor tempest roared, and where, at last, the “storm-beat vessel safely rode.” What a fearful history would those three centuries present if it could but be truly written—if we could but have the everyday life of those all but unknown kings! forgotten as their very graves are, and scattered their ashes into dust, which ages ago mingled imperceptibly with the breeze, and was blown onward, unseen and unfelt. Yet there was a time when even

the meanest and the most unknown marched in pomp to the Pagan temple, or lowly Christian church, when before them the noisy heralds went, and the applauding mob swelled behind, and rude as the crown and sceptre might be, and all the barbaric pearl and gold, still the holy oil was poured forth, and solemn prayers offered up, and the whole witenagemot, with the neighbouring nobles, were assembled together, and the little world around them for days after talked only of the coronation of the king. Thousands at their command had mustered in battle, high nobles had bowed their heads before them; on a word from their lips life or death frequently hung; valour and beauty were gathered around their thrones, and, when they rode forth in grand procession, the wondering crowd rushed out to gaze,—even as it does now. Edwin, with his banner borne before him, and Offa, with his trumpets sounding in the streets, were as much a marvel above a thousand years ago, as her present Majesty is in the provinces in our own time. Yet there are many in the present day who think it a waste of time to dwell for a few hours upon the fates of those ancient kings, who, forsooth! because they have been so long dead, are considered as undeserving of notice by those who seem to measure the events of the past by their own present insignificance, who, conscious that they themselves will be forgotten for ever as soon as the grave has closed over them, look begrudgingly upon almost every name that Time has not wholly obliterated.

CHAPTER XVI.

OFFA, SURNAMED THE TERRIBLE.

“Come, come you spirits
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
 And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
 Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
 Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
 And take my milk for gall.”—SHAKSPERE.

To the kingdom of Mercia must we again turn the reader's attention for a few moments, and take up the thread of our history from the death of Ethelbald, who, it will be remembered, fell, while endeavouring to put down the rebellion which was headed by Bernred. Of the latter we know nothing, excepting that he reigned for a few months, when he was either banished by the nobles, or driven from the throne by Offa, surnamed The Terrible, who descended from a brother of the king-slaying Penda. Though we have no clear proofs of the means by which Offa got possession of the crown of Mercia, there are many dark allusions scattered over the works of the monkish historians who were living about this period, which scarcely leave a doubt that he obtained the title of The Terrible through the violent measures he had recourse to in attaining it. Bede says, he won the kingdom of Mercia “with a bloody sword.” One of the most romantic incidents which occur in the records of this period, is that which first introduced the future queen, Drida, into Offa's presence. She was a bold, beautiful, ambitious, and cruel woman, and appears to have been related to Charlemagne. She committed some crime, for which she was doomed to undergo the ordeal of iron or fire; but although her deeds were so clearly proved, yet, as she was allied to Charlemagne, she was allowed the more merciful ordeal of water, and launched alone upon the pathless ocean, in a small boat, without either oar, rudder, or sail. She was supplied with food for a few days, and left to the winds and waves, by which she was driven upon the British

coast, somewhere on the territory over which Offa reigned. The storm-tossed beauty was conducted to the presence of the Mercian monarch, and having had ample time, while thrown from wave to wave, companionless upon the ocean, to make up a false tale, she at once gave utterance to a story which won both the pity and the love of Offa at the same time. He resigned her to the care of his mother for a few days, frequently visited her, and speedily married her.

“He loved her for the dangers she had passed,
And she loved him that he did pity them.”

Such is the account given in his life, written by a monk of St. Albans, the abbey of which was founded by Offa. Could we prove that Homer was familiar to the monkish historian, we should be justified in imagining that he had transformed Ulysses into Drida, and changed Calypso to Offa; but whether or not, the wild legend has a doubtful look, though it has been quoted by grave authors, and is admitted into several histories.

Offa was not a king who sat asleep with the sceptre in his hand; there was the wakeful and ambitious queen Drida now by his side; and, startling as it may seem, the dark events which stained their reign, and the deeds of Offa's daughter, Edburga, would in the hands of a Shakspeare furnish the materials for another tragedy, that might stand side by side with Macbeth. Her cold cruel pride, and chilling haughtiness, are said to have broken the heart of Offa's mother, and, in a few months, to have hurried her into the grave. The blinded king saw only her superb beauty, for she appears to have been a female fiend, that outwardly wore an angel's form. Brave as a lion, and possessing talents that would have broken through the gloom of the most benighted period, the Mercian king marched onward from conquest to conquest, now achieving deeds that win our admiration, then sinking down to commit such crimes as must have made his subjects shudder. On each side of him Drida and his daughter are ever rising up, like two spirits that attract our attention, as they come out in the sunshine to smile, or rush shrieking from amid the darkness, into which they had plunged, to accomplish some new and horrible deed; they seem to come and go with a terrible distinctness, that makes us tremble as they either approach or vanish, as if Mercy fled before them, and we heard, in the place from which she had hurried affrighted,

dying moans, and Love wailing upon the very lips on which he, expiring, kissed the poison of death. All is dim as a dream, or startling as some appalling reality which we look upon with a doubtful consciousness. So perplexing and unnatural appear the events of this period, that the generality of historians seem to have paused, looked round for a moment, in doubt and wonder, then hastened off to visit less forbidding scenes: as if they feared to grapple with the shadows and the realities, that here seem to be ever exchanging places, throwing aside what is only doubtful as feeble, and dreading to look among events which seem cruel and unnatural for their horrible truth, as if years, because they have rolled away, were empty of events, and days dawned not upon hopes and fears as in the present day. Wild-roses blew, and nightingales sang, as they do now, and the smell and sound were as sweet to those who went out to look and listen, in the noon-day, or in the twilight, and returning, were stabbed by the way, or laid their heads upon their pillows unconscious of the poison that would, before the dawning, with a noiseless power, unlock and throw open the silent gates of death. The murdered kings who were hurried into their graves by these merciless women, once enjoyed the tender green of Spring, and the sober gold of the Autumnal foliage, as we still do. What a period are we now picturing! A king is murdered and consigned to his grave; his successor builds a monastery, or makes a pilgrimage to Rome, and believes that he has purchased forgiveness. A queen rushes out of the chamber, and leaves behind her the yet warm body of the husband she has poisoned, crosses the sea, and becomes an abbess. A young king comes wooing, in all the hey-day of life, is allured from the banquet by the mother of the fair princess for whose hand he is suing, taken into the next apartment, and put to death. And these are the solemn truths of English history—the dark deeds that were done by those who sat on the very throne which Alfred the Great himself occupied. The events which we record in this chapter, were written down by Alfred nearly a thousand years ago; he heard them from the lips of those whose fathers had lived and moved through all these stirring scenes.

We have before shown in what a defenceless state Northumbria was left. Offa, doubtless well acquainted with the civil dissensions by which it was rent asunder, attacked it, as his uncle Penda had done beforetime; what advantages he gained, are

not recorded. He next marched into Kent, fought a hardly contested battle at Otunford or Otford, conquered, and annexed that kingdom to Mercia. At the battle of Bensington, he defeated Cynewulf, king of Wessex, and either took possession of his dominions, or compelled him to become his ally; that Offa did not dethrone him is evident from an incident which we shall shortly have to narrate. The ancient Britons were not yet at rest, for whenever a favourable opportunity occurred, they sallied forth from the corners into which they were driven, slew and plundered the Saxons, and hastened back again into their mountain-fortresses as soon as they saw a stronger force approaching. They had several times invaded Mercia, and, emboldened by their success, at length drove the Saxons who dwelt beside the Severn, further into the heart of the kingdom. Offa at last armed, and led on, a powerful force against them. The Welsh fled into their hidden fastnesses, where they stood until his back was turned upon them, when they again ventured forth. The Mercian king once more approached, when the mountaineers, as usual, fled, and all the open country, from the Severn to the river Wye, was cleared of them; this time Offa determined to imprison this daring remnant of the old Cymry within their own limited territories. To accomplish this, he commanded a vast trench to be dug, and a huge rampart to be thrown up, as the Roman generals had done centuries before; and this gigantic work he extended for nearly a hundred miles, carrying it over marsh, and morass, and mountain, from the river Dee to the entrance of the Wye, strengthening it also with fortresses, which he manned with chosen and hardy soldiers. But the Welsh were not long before they filled up a large portion of the ditch, made a wide gap through the ramparts, and fell upon Offa's warriors while they were holding their Christmas feast, and more than one Saxon fortress was left standing all throughout that dark winter night without a sentinel. Offa again arose, and revenged the deaths of his followers; the king of North Wales, and many of the old British nobles, fell at the battle of Rhuddlan, and those who were taken prisoners were doomed to the severest slavery. Mercia was not disturbed again by the Welsh during the reign of Offa the Terrible. The remains of the immense work, which ages after retained the name of Claudh Offa, or Offa's Dyke, are still visible, and for centuries were the acknowledged barrier that divided England from Wales; many an unrecorded combat

was fought on those ancient boundaries, and the remains of many a hero, whose name will never now be known, lie buried deep down within those filled-up trenches.

Perhaps Offa's marriage with Drida was the first cause of his opening a correspondence with the renowned Charlemagne; but whatever it might be, the letters that passed between them reveal the earliest traces of a protected trade with the continent. The Frankish king offered to permit all pilgrims to pass securely through his dominions; and such as came not on religious missions, but were engaged in commerce, were to pass safely to and fro, after paying the requisite duties. To Offa, Charlemagne sent as proofs of his kindness and friendship, a rich belt, an Hungarian sword, and two cloaks of silk. Trifling as these matters may at first appear, they show what silent strides civilization was already making; duties paid on commerce for protection are different things to the dogs and horses which, centuries before, the Britons were wont to present to the Roman emperors whenever they required their aid.

Egbert, who was destined to become the grandfather of Alfred the Great, resided for a time at Offa's court; but when Brihtric ascended the throne of Wessex, and demanded the hand of Edburga, Egbert hastened to France, where he became a great favourite with Charlemagne; and there he not only improved himself in learning and military tactics, but by departing from Britain, saved his life, for Brihtric was already jealous of the fame he had won, while residing with Offa, and sought to destroy him. Had the gifted young prince offended Edburga by refusing her hand, and was this jealousy aroused by queen Drida and her daughter? There is one of those mysterious blanks here which we are at a loss to fill up rightly, for it is not clear that Egbert fled to Offa for protection, but on the contrary he appears to have been a guest of the Mercian king's, for some time before Brihtric sought the hand of Edburga. According to William of Malmesbury, Egbert's claim to the throne of Wessex was superior to Brihtric's; but we must not pass over the event by which the throne of Wessex became vacant. Cynewulf we have already seen measuring arms with Offa at the battle of Bensington, where he was defeated. He became jealous of Cyneheard, who was a brother of Sigebyrht, a king who had been driven from the throne of Wessex, and he either sought to slay him, or banish him from the kingdom. Cyneheard made his escape, but

no further than into a neighbouring wood, near Merton in Surrey, where he lay concealed, having, however, a number of spies about him, who were ever on the look out after the king, for Cyneheard had resolved to strike the first blow; nor was it long before an opportunity occurred that favoured his purpose.

A fair lady lived at Merton, whom Cynewulf frequently visited, often coming with only a few attendants; his enemy was on the look out, and soon surrounded the house after he had seen the king enter. Cynewulf threw open the door, rushed out, and wounded Cyneheard; a dozen swords were at once uplifted against him; the king of Wessex fought alone against them all, his followers were in another part of the house; there was not one by to aid him, and he was slain. Assistance came too late; the tumult had aroused those within, and, snatching up their weapons, they hastened out to defend their master; they beheld him fallen and bleeding beside the threshold. Cyneheard parleyed with them for a few moments, offered them broad lands, and rich rewards, if they would serve him; they threw back his offer with disdain, and foot to foot, and hand to hand, did they fight until only one remained alive; the dead followers, and the dead king, lay side by side. The tidings of Cynewulf's death were soon blown abroad, and others speedily rode up to revenge the murder of their sovereign. To these Cyneheard made the same offers, and received the same reply, their only answer being the naked weapons they presented; they had come to revenge the death of their king, to demand life for life, and with but few words they fell upon Cyneheard and his followers, and slew them all, excepting one, who was severely wounded. Thus Brihtric ascended the throne of Wessex, and married the daughter of Offa,—and dark was the bridal chamber into which he entered.

Turn we to another scene. A young lady was leaning upon the ledge of the palace-window, watching a long train of knights entering the court-yard, and admiring the beauty of one who appeared to be their chief, when she called upon her mother to come forward and witness the scene. That lady was the youngest daughter of Offa, the woman she called her mother, queen Drida, the youth she had admired, Ethelbert, who had just succeeded to the throne of East Anglia, and had now come with costly presents, to seek her hand, and form an alliance with the powerful house of Mercia. Drida had those beyond the sea whom she wished to serve, with whom she had in vain endeavoured to

unite her daughter in marriage; there was but one left single now, the youngest, Alflæda, and the youthful king of East Anglia had come to carry her off also. She had seen her husband welcome him, and the warm reception Ethelbert had received, was gall and wormwood to her. The evil spirit rose strong within her, and she resolved he should never again quit her roof until he was carried to his grave.

She called Offa aside. She well knew the power of her beauty: the weak point of her husband—ambition. She pointed out the number of followers who, encamped without the palace walls, had accompanied Ethelbert,—assured him that marriage was not the errand he had come upon;—that his design extended to the crown of Mercia. Offa doubted her assertions. Cunning as she was cruel, she suddenly turned round the point of her argument, then proceeded to show him that if even the young king did marry their daughter, he would, from the moment of his union, consider himself as heir to the throne of Mercia, and hourly look for Offa's death; nay, seek to hasten it if an opportunity offered. She showed him how Ethelbert had made himself acquainted with the roads which led through Mercia—how he must have observed every salient point of the kingdom as he passed along; and, perceiving that the king looked perplexed, she added—"Either he will shortly be the cause of your death, or you must now be the cause of his."—The poor blinded husband admitted the truth of her argument, confessed that he was exposed to peril; yet, according to one of the old chroniclers, turned away, and firmly refused to partake in such a "detestable crime as she suggested; which," added he, "would bring eternal disgrace upon me and my successors."

The two kings sat down to the feast; the hall of the palace resounded with mirth. Drida came in every now and then, and when called upon to account for her absence, said she had been looking after the apartment which she was fitting up for the reception of her royal guest: for Ethelbert had spent the previous night in his camp, as the day was drawing to a decline long before he reached the royal residence. In the room which the queen had set apart for the East Anglian king, she had caused a splendid throne to be erected, which was overhung with curious drapery, and surmounted by a rich canopy. In the adjoining apartment a beautiful couch was fitted up, on which he was to sleep. She came in again with the same smiling look, and armed

with that beauty which Time had only rendered more imposing and majestic. She sat down to the feast, and whiled away the hour with pleasant and playful conversation. All without looked calm, and cheerful, and captivating, while within, there rolled dark and deep-moving murder, and savage vengeance; and all the awful turmoil, which ever beats about the restless brain of disappointed ambition. The Saxon gleemen sung, and tumbled; the wine-cup circulated—rich pigment, sweetened with honey, and flavoured with spices, was handed round in costly vessels; mead mellowed with the juice of mulberries, and strong wines, made odoriferous with the flowers and sweet-herbs which had been used in the preparation, passed from hand to hand; and all went “merry as a marriage bell,” when the antiquated syren turned sweetly round, and assumed one of those studied looks which had saved her from the fiery ordeal—which, when tossed like a wave upon the ocean, had won its way through Offa’s heart to his throne; she exclaimed, (and probably laid her hand upon the shoulder of her unsuspecting victim, as she spoke;) “Come, my son, Alflæda anxiously awaits you in the chamber I have prepared; she wishes to hear the words of love which her intended husband has to say.” It is not improbable that she led him in playfully by the hand—not one of his attendants followed. When he entered the room, she bade him sit down upon the throne, which stood in readiness to receive him; and, looking round with feigned wonder, marvelled why her daughter had not already arrived. With the merry mead playing about his brain, we can almost picture Ethelbert uttering some jest as he threw himself laughing into the gorgeous seat. We can see the last smile linger about Drida’s eye, the sparkling fire of vengeance heaving up, as the demon-like glare flashed forth, the instant she had released her hand—for the moment Ethelbert threw himself upon the throne, it sunk beneath him, into the pit, or well over which it had been placed. There was help at hand, men behind the arras, who listened silently for the fall. They rushed forth, Drida aided them. Beds, pillows, and hangings, were thrown upon the shrieking king, to drown his cries; and when all was silent, the trap-door was again closed. There is scarcely a doubt that Offa was privy to the deed. The fact of his taking possession of East Anglia immediately after the murder of Ethelbert, is a strong proof of his guilt; though some have attempted to show that he but seized upon it in self-

defence, when the East Anglians swore to revenge the death of their sovereign.

Alfreda, the fair betrothed, fled from the murderous court, to the monastery of Croyland; and in the midst of those wild marshes, where the bittern boomed, and the tufted plover went ever wailing through the air, she assumed the habit of a nun, and dedicated the remainder of her days, which were few, to the service of God.

In the "Life of Offa," which we have before alluded to, it is stated that the Mercian monarch banished the royal murderess to one of the most solitary fortresses in his dominions,—that she carried with her an immense treasure, which she had reaped from many a crime, and wrung from many a one who had groaned beneath her oppression: that, lonely and neglected, she was left to gloat over the gold for which she had perilled her soul. But vengeance was not long before it overtook her. The lonely fortress to which she was banished was attacked by robbers, her treasures taken from her, and she herself cruelly tortured, then thrown into a well, where she was left to expire, unwept, and unpitied. A strange resemblance does her end bear to that of the youthful king, whom she caused to be so ruthlessly butchered.

Edburga inherited all her mother's vices; she was envious, ambitious, and cruel. Those who became favourites with her husband, Brihtric, she hated, allowing no one to share his confidence or his counsel without drawing down her vengeance; and when she could not succeed in obtaining their disgrace or banishment, she caused them to be secretly poisoned, for there were ever emissaries at her elbow, ready to do their wicked work. Like her mother Drida, she found a pleasure in the execution of dark and dreadful deeds. There was a youth who stood high in the estimation of the king, whom Edburga had long endeavoured, but in vain, to overthrow. Brihtric turned a deaf ear to all her complaints, and seldom trusted his envied favourite out of his sight. But she had sent too many of her victims to the grave, and was acquainted with too many ready roads, which led direct to death, to abandon her prey; so, following her old sure and speedy path, she poured poison into his wine-cup. That night the king drank out of the same vessel as his favourite, and died. She sent one soul more to the dark dominions than she had intended; and, dreading the vengeance of her nobles, she

packed up all the treasures she could find in the palace, and hastened off to France. The West Saxons passed a decree that no king's consort should in future share her husband's throne, but that the title of queen should be abolished.

The murderess presented herself before Charlemagne, with all her treasures, and, doubtless, as her mother Drida had before-time done, when tossed by the angry ocean upon the British coast, she feigned some story to account for her coming, for Charlemagne asked her whether she would choose himself or his son, who stood beside him, for her husband. She boldly replied—"Your son, because he is the youngest." The monarch answered: "that if she had chosen him, it was his intention to have given her to his son; but now," added he, "you shall have neither." A strong proof that she had forged some tale about the death of Brihtric, for such a proposition would never have been made to her had Charlemagne known that she had just hurried, with breathless haste, from the dead body of her murdered husband. She went into a monastery, became abbess, and was quickly driven out for the immoral and infamous life she there led. "Last scene of all"—the haughty daughter of Offa became a common beggar in the streets of Pavia, where she was led about by a little girl. King Alfred mentions these facts; he heard them from those who knew her well. Offa was then in his grave. His son reigned but a few months—Ed-burga died a beggar in the streets—Alfreda soon after in the monastery of Croyland. The whole race was swept away; not one was left alive in whose veins there ran the blood of Offa the Terrible. Neither sable tragedy nor dark romance were ever woven from wilder materials than the historical truths which form this gloomy chapter.

CHAPTER XVII.

EGBERT, KING OF ALL THE SAXONS.

“ O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows !
 When that my care could not withhold thy riots,
 What wilt thou do, when riot is thy care ?
 O, thou wilt be a wilderness again,
 Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants ! ” — SHAKSPERE.

EGBERT was no sooner apprised of the death of Brihtric, than he hastened out of France, to take possession of the throne of Wessex, and never had a Saxon sovereign that had hitherto swayed the perilous sceptre come armed with the experience of the new king. He had studied in the stern school of Charlemagne, had narrowly scanned the policy pursued by that great monarch, both in the council and in the camp, and was well prepared to collect and reduce to order the stormy elements which had so long been let loose over Britain; for, in addition to the civil discords which shook the land, the Danes had already invaded our island. Few kings had ever received a warmer welcome from their subjects than that which awaited Egbert on his accession, for he was the last descendant of the race of Cerdric. Kent, Essex, and East Anglia, had already acknowledged the power of Mercia; Northumbria had long been rent asunder by internal dissensions; and Sussex was by this time united to Wessex. Having thus doubled its strength and enlarged its territories, the kingdom over which Egbert reigned was, with the exception of Mercia, the only independent state that stood unbroken amid the ruins of the Octarchy.

Kenwulf sat firmly upon the throne, whose foundation Offa had so well consolidated. Egbert watched him with an eagle eye, but though ever on the alert, the Mercian king was too wary to become an aggressor; and the Wessex sovereign knew too well the strength of his rival, to be the first to commence an attack. Both kingdoms seemed overhung with the same threatening sky, but no one could tell on which it would first break, though all could foresee that, in spite of its remaining so long stationary, the storm must at last burst forth. As the petty

states around them crumbled to pieces, were gathered up and built in upon other foundations, so did each silently seek to possess himself of the ruins and overtop the other, making an outward parade of their strength; yet each tacitly acknowledging, by their forbearance, how much they envied, yet respected, their neighbours' power. Like two expert wrestlers, each retained his hold, without venturing to overthrow his adversary. This state of things could not last long; yet while Kenwulf lived, he kept the balance so equally poised, that, with all his ambition, Egbert ventured not to touch the scale. The king of Mercia died, and, from that moment, Wessex slowly gained the ascendancy. Hitherto Egbert had contented himself by carrying his arms into Cornwall and Devonshire, and waging war with the Britons. After Kenwulf's death, he aimed at the sole sovereignty of Britain, and circumstances soon favoured his long-meditated conquest. Had Egbert died first, Kenwulf would have aspired to the same power.

The Mercian king left his son Kinelm, who was only seven years of age, and heir to the throne, to the charge of his sisters. Windreda, the eldest, was not long before she caused her brother to be put to death. His tutor, Askebert, was the instrument chosen by this unnatural sister to accomplish the deed. It is said that she promised to share with him the sovereignty. Under the pretence of hunting, the unsuspecting prince was led into a neighbouring wood, and there murdered. The spot in which the body was interred was, after some time, discovered by a herdsman, who went in search of one of his cows which had gone astray; a miracle in the old monkish legends is appended to the discovery. The sceptre of Mercia was wrested from the hands of Windreda by her uncle, Ceolwulf, who, however, did not retain it long before he was driven from the throne by Beornwulf, which revolution soon shook the kingdom of Mercia to its very centre. Egbert still stood aloof; the time for action had not yet arrived. He foresaw that the last usurper would not long remain inactive; nor was he wrong. Beornwulf rushed headlong into a war with Wessex. The battle took place at Wilton, which, in ancient times, was called Ellan; and although the Mercians mustered together the largest force upon the field, Egbert, after a sharp contest, won the victory.

Although the king of Wessex did not carry his victorious arms at once into Mercia, he lost no time in annexing Kent to

his dominions, thus weakening at once his rival's power. To accomplish this, he despatched his son Ethelwulf, the father of our Alfred the Great, with a strong force into Kent, who drove the vassal king across the Thames. Egbert next promised to support the East Anglians, if they would rise and declare themselves independent of the Mercian king. He kept his word. Beornwulf fell in the first battle. Ludecan succeeded him, and also perished in the next contest. Wiglaf then took the command of the Mercian forces, but before he had time to strengthen his army, and make up for their previous defeats, Egbert was upon him, and the power of Wessex was at last triumphant. Wiglaf fled into the monastery of Croyland, and appears to have been so closely pursued, that he was compelled to seek shelter in the very cell which the daughter of Offa occupied—the sanctity of which the invaders respected: here he remained four months. What a shock must the feelings of the fair nun have undergone when the last defender of Mercia rushed into her little apartment to save his life—from the very night when she fled from her father's palace, pale and woe-begone, and horror-struck at the murder of her intended husband—from that very night had the fortune of her family begun to decline, and now she was all that remained of the once powerful house of Offa. What changes had that Saxon princess witnessed, what shifting scenes could she recal as she sat in the solitude of her cell, contemplating the past as it rose before her!

By the intercession of Siward, Wiglaf was permitted to occupy the throne of Mercia, on condition that he paid tribute to Egbert—the abbot of Croyland attested the payment. Prior to this period, the Northumbrians grew weary of being without a king, and Eanred now sat upon the throne. During the reign of Kenwulf he had been bold enough to invade Mercia. As Egbert had by this time subdued the whole Oetarchy, with the exception of Northumbria, he determined to carry his victorious army into Deiri and Bernicia. Eanred well knew that it was useless to measure arms with a monarch who had already compelled five Saxon kingdoms to acknowledge his power, so he came forth submissively, and, like the rest, became a tributary vassal to the king of Wessex. Egbert next invaded Wales, and penetrated into the very heart of Snowdon: victory still attended him. From the Tweed to the Land's End of Cornwall, no one

now arose to dispute his sovereign sway. No Saxon king had ever before ruled over such a vast extent of territory, for he was at last sole king of England, although he never assumed that proud title; neither did any Saxon king after him ever rule over such a length and breadth of land.

We have before stated that, during the reign of Offa, the Danes had landed in England; they first arrived with three ships, approached one of the royal cities, when the sheriff of the place, thinking they were foreign merchants, rode up with a few attendants to inquire their business. Their answers being unsatisfactory, he ordered them to be driven away, when they fell upon him, and he, with all who accompanied him, were slain. The Danes then plundered the town; but before they escaped to their ships, Offa's soldiers attacked them. After this defeat, they returned again, landed in Northumbria, ravaged the country, sacked the abbey of Lindisfarne, slew several of the monks, then retreated with an immense spoil to their ships. At several other parts of the island they had also landed, before Egbert occupied the throne of Wessex. In the year 832 they came again; Egbert had made the whole kingdom of the Octarchy bow before the power of Wessex, and doubtless had sat down, expecting to doze away the remainder of his days peaceably upon his throne, when tidings came that a number of these savage pagans had landed in the Isle of Sheppey, slaughtered several of the inhabitants, and, laden with plunder, had again escaped to sea without a single vessel pursuing them.

The next year, the Danes came with thirty-five ships, and were met by Egbert at Charmouth, in Dorsetshire, and if the English were not defeated in this engagement, they lost a considerable number of men, amongst whom were two bishops and two ealdermen; while the Danes sustained but little loss, and escaped, as before, with their ships. So serious had the ravages of the sea-kings now become, that a council was held in London, to devise the best means to prevent their depredations. At this council Egbert presided, and, according to the charter which Wiglaf granted to the abbey of Croyland, wherein direct allusion is made to a promise given at the time, there were present, "Egbert, and Athelwulf his son, and all the bishops and great ealdermen of England, consulting together as to the best means of repelling the constant incursions of the Danes on the English coast." These northern invaders soon found ready allies amongst

the remnant of the ancient Cymry, who still inhabited a corner of Cornwall and the adjacent neighbourhood, and were as ready as in the days of king Arthur, to league themselves with any enemy who was bold enough to attack the Saxons. But the martial spirit of the ancient Britons had all but died out; the few embers that remained, when stirred, retained all their former glow, then faded again in their old ashy grey, and sank into a lesser compass at every touch; for the smouldering waste had slowly gone on, year after year, and no new fuel having been added, the hidden sparks huddled hopelessly together—Liberty had neglected to come, as the bards had promised she would do: the altar and the spark were still there, but the long-looked for sacrifice never came, which was to light the whole island with its blaze. Still, the old Cymry were not yet dead; they hailed the Danes as their deliverers, and thinly as they were sprinkled over the surrounding country, they gladly mustered what force they could, and joined the stormy sea-kings at Hengston Hill, in Cornwall. Egbert met them with a well-appointed army, and defeated their united forces with terrible slaughter.

The following year, Egbert died, after a reign of thirty-seven years, and was succeeded by his son, Ethelwulf, the father of Alfred the Great. The king of all the Saxons sank into his grave, with the fond hope that the whole Octarchy had now become united like one family, all acknowledging one sway; that the civil dissensions by which each separate state had so long been torn asunder had for ever ceased; and as the Danish invaders had not again appeared since their dreadful defeat at Hengston Hill, he closed his dying eyes, and left his country at peace. But scarcely was he within his grave, before the northern hordes again poured into England, spreading greater consternation than the Saxons had ever done amongst the Britons. The hour of retribution, which the Cymry had so long looked for, was fast approaching, but few of their ancient race lived to witness its fulfilment; for time, and conquest, and slavery, and death, had left but few of those early inhabitants behind, whose forefathers first landed upon our island, and called it the Country of Sea Cliffs. But we have reached another of those ancient landmarks, which stand wide apart along the shores of History, the grey monuments which overlook that still sea of death, where nameless millions have for ages been buried. From these we must now turn away to gaze upon another race, more savage

and uncivilized than the preceding invaders ever were, when, nearly four centuries before, they first rowed their long chiules over the same stormy seas, and marvelled to find an island in the ocean, which contained walled cities and stately temples, and tall columns, that might have vied with classic Rome. To the Danes must we now turn—those children of the creeks, who, under the guidance of their sea-kings, followed the road of the swans, as they called the ocean, and hewed out a home with their swords, wherever the winds or the waves wafted or drifted them.

Invasion of the Danes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ANCIENT SEA-KINGS.

“The Northmen sailed in their nailed ships,
 On the roaring sea over deep water—
 They left behind them raw to devour
 The sallow kite, the swarthy raven with horny nib,
 And the house vulture, with the eagle swift,
 And that grey beast, the wolf of the wold,
 To consume the prey.”

ANGLO-SAXON WAR SONG.—Ingram's *Translation*.

THE Danes, Norwegians, or Norsemen, for it matters not by which title we distinguish them, descended from the same primitive race as the Anglo-Saxons—the old Teutonic or Gothic tribes. But to enter fully into the mixed population, all of whom sprung from this ancient stock, and at different periods invaded England, we should have to go deeply into the early history of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Their religion was the same as that which we have described at the commencement of the Saxon invasion. They worshipped Odin, and died in the hope of enjoying the brutal delights which their imaginations pictured as never-ending in the halls of Valhalla. From the rocky coast of Norway, and the very islands where Hengist, and Cerdric, and Ella, first led their followers, the stormy sea-kings came: across the rough Baltic they rode; they swarmed like locusts along the neighbouring shores, and were neither intimidated by the tempest, nor disheartened by the defeats which they frequently sustained. The kingdoms from whence they came were divided into petty sovereignties, where one chief made war upon the other—where the conqueror of yesterday was likely enough to be driven on the morrow to the sea-coast, and, finally, out into the ocean, when, with his ships, he became a sea-king, and over the billows rode merrily to dis-

cover some other country. If he returned enriched with plunder, he was respected; if he came back empty-handed, he was despised. His vessels laden with spoil soon procured him plenty of followers, and then his former conqueror fell a victim; for over each province, or state, that could furnish forth a dozen ships, each of which contained about sixty or seventy armed men, there a sea-king was to be found. Norway alone, at one period, was divided into about thirty of these sovereignties.

Others there were who possessed not a rood of territory, whose only property was their ships, the crews their subjects, the sword their sceptre; who had no alternative but to plunder or perish, to slay or starve, or stay at home and prey upon their brethren, who themselves were ever darting out from the herbless coast to seize whatever they saw passing upon the sea. If the family retained any landed possession, one son stayed at home to inherit it, the rest sallied out with their ships to seek their fortune across the deep; for a few vessels, well equipped and ably manned, were considered a rich inheritance amongst the Danes. At twelve years of age, they were initiated into this piratical profession, and taught to believe that to plunder and to slay were the only honourable passports to wealth and glory—the only employments that were considered noble. The lessons their fathers taught them, all tended to the same end, for they left their children no wealth. “Go, my sons,” said they, “and reap riches and renown, with your ships and your swords.” They learned to despise inherited property; they valued that most which had been won by the greatest danger, and prized highest the plunder which they had become possessed of by venturing into the most perilous paths.

In bays and creeks, and in the shadows of jutting headlands, they concealed themselves, where they were ever ready, at a moment's notice, to rush upon the passing prey. When out at sea, they cared not where they were driven to, so long as it was not to their own coast. They called the storm their servant, and wherever it carried them, they said “that was the spot where they desired to go—the tempest that hurled them along with its mighty breath but came, that the rowers might rest their weary arms.” Those who were drowned, they believed, went safely to Odin; those who survived, but laughed at the storm they had escaped. Danger depressed them not, and death they but considered as a common and necessary companion, who

went on his appointed mission to conduct them to the halls of Odin, and returned again unheeded, and dwelt amongst them from day to day; coming and going like a common messenger that scarcely merited a passing remark. They looked upon the Saxon Christians as traitors to their gods; and as they had been crushed under the iron hand of Charlemagne, and been subjected to revolting cruelties to compel them to renounce their ancient creed, they believed that they rendered true service to Odin by slaughtering the priests, and destroying the churches of Christ. Such of the unconverted Saxons as still inhabited the neighbourhood of Jutland, readily formed a league with the more distant sea-kings, and, thus banded together, they made head against their common enemies, though their near brethren; for they now looked upon them as renegades, and neither the resemblance which they bore to each other in feature or language, nor the remembrance that all were once of the same religion, checked for a moment their hostile spirit. In former times, they worked themselves up into fits of madness, bit their shields, and imitated the howling of wolves, and the barking of dogs; and, under this excitement, performed feats of unnatural strength, such as maniacs alone are capable of achieving. When in this state, woe to the warriors they rushed upon! Such savage deeds were common in early times amongst the followers of Odin. It is said that, in the darker centuries, they ate the flesh of horses raw, dragged the infant from the breast of its mother, and tossed it from one to another upon the points of their lances.

They decorated the prows of their ships with the figures of animals: the heads of shaggy lions, and savage bulls, and hideous dragons, were placed at the front of their vessels, and threw their grim shadows upon the waves. Along the sides of their ships they hung their shields, which, placed together, threw back the billows, and thus protected them from the surges of the sea, as they did from the blows dealt in battle. On their masts were placed the figures of birds, whose outstretched wings veered round with every wind that blew. Some of their vessels were built in the form of a serpent, the prow resembling the head, the long stern forming the tail; these they called the great sea-serpents, or sea-dragons. When they unloosed their cables, and left their ships to career freely over the waves, they called it giving their great sea-horses the rein. They lashed the prows of their vessels together, and while thus linked, steered right

into their enemies' ships; over the dragons', and the bulls', and the lions' heads they leaped, and courageously boarded the foe. The huge club, studded with spikes, which dealt death wherever it fell, they called the "star of the morning." When they fought, they called their war-cry, "chaunting the mass of lances;" to show their contempt for the Christian creed, they stabled their horses in the Christian churches; and when they finished the repast which they had compelled the reluctant host to furnish, they slew him, and burnt his house.*

When they ascended the rivers, and found a convenient and secure station, they drew up their vessels, as the Romans had done beforetime, threw up intrenchments, and left a guard behind, while the bulk of their force sallied out to scour the country, burning and slaying wherever they came, seizing upon all the horses they could capture, to carry their plunder over-land; and when hotly pursued, or followed by a superior force, they broke up their encampment, and trusted for safety to their ships. After a time, they became bolder; drove away or slaughtered the natives, and settled down upon the land they had taken from the inhabitants. Some they allowed to reside amongst them, on condition that they renounced their religion; and the ceremony of a Christian becoming a pagan consisted of his partaking of the flesh of a horse, which was sacrificed on one of their altars dedicated to the worship of Odin. When the sea-kings made a solemn vow, they swore upon a golden bracelet. In their social hours, all were equal; no man was then addressed as chief; all distinction was levelled. They sat in a circle, and passed the drinking-horn from hand to hand. He whom they obeyed in battle, whom they followed wherever he chose to steer his ship—when the victory was won, laid his dignity aside; for the stormy spirit who ruled in the tempest and heralded the way in the fight, (though still a sea-king if the alarm was given,) was, while peace lasted, and the feast continued, on a level with the lowest of his followers. This very unbending, during these festive moments, linked the chief closer to his subjects, and made them feel that he was one of themselves; it left ambition less to aspire to, and lowly valour to receive the same meed of praise. He was chosen king, who was best fitted to endure the greatest

* Thierry's Norman Conquest; Turner's Anglo-Saxons, and the early English Chronicles.

hardships, and not for his high rank alone; one who had never slept under a house-roof, nor emptied a cup beside the domestic hearth, but whose habitation had, from childhood, ever been his ship, was the sea-king they would follow to the gates of the grave; such a one they chose, when the leader in whose veins the blood of Woden was believed to have flowed, either slept beneath the waves, or furnished a feast for the ravens in the deserted battle-field.

The dangers they recklessly dared, would necessarily require a frequent change of chieftains; and as such qualities as we have enumerated were essential to the character of a sea-king, the command was left open to all who, by their bravery, chose to aspire to it; and nothing could be more conducive to the cultivation of a high spirit of valour than that levelling of all distinction. He who in his social moments hailed all as his equals, would, in the hour of trial, rally around him the stoutest and the truest hearts; and to prove their devotedness, they would follow him through fire and flood, nor leave him when he fell across the dark threshold of death.

Such were the stormy sea-kings, whose ships were now darkening the ocean, who were soon to become sharers of the island which their adventurous brethren had wrested from the Britons, and who were destined to enrich the plains of England with each other's blood. The grim gods of the ancient Cymry seemed to require some savage sacrifice before they departed for ever from the wave-washed island on which their altars had for centuries blazed.

Through a land whose skies were reddened by the fires of the destroyer, and whose fields were heavy and wet with the blood of the slain, are we now about to journey; and after toiling through two weary centuries of slaughter, we shall but sit down upon the shore, to be startled again by the sound of the Norman trumpets. A king lives and dies, a battle is won and lost; and he who next succeeds to the throne, or wins the victory, sweeps over the dead who have passed away, as the autumn-blast whirls the withered leaves before it, until the very storm itself dies out, and others awaken from the caverned sleep in which they have grown strong enough to contend with the green array of a new summer. Briton, Saxon, Dane, and Norman, are like the four seasons which make up the long year of our history.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF THE DANES IN NORTHUMBRIA.

"On Norway's coast the widowed dame
 May wash the rock with tears,
 May long look o'er the shipless seas
 Before her mate appears;
 May sit and weep, and hope in vain,—
 Her lord lies in the clay,
 And never more will he again
 Ride o'er the salt sea-spray."

THE OLD BALLAD OF "HARDYKNUTE."

ETHELWULPH, although placed, in his father's life-time, upon the throne of Kent, had assumed the monastic habit, and a dispensation from the pope had to be obtained before he could be crowned king of Wessex. He appears to have been a man of a mild and indolent disposition, one who would have made a better monk than a monarch, and have been much happier in the dreamy quietude of the cloister, than in the stir and tumult of the camp. Alstan, the bishop of Sherbourne, who had shared the council and favour of Egbert, was the first to arouse Ethelwulph from his natural lethargy; for the bishop possessed a fiery and military spirit, better adapted to lead an army into battle, and to sound the war-cry, than to guide a peaceful flock along those pleasant pastures, where prayer and praise ought alone to be heard. Could the king and the priest but have exchanged places, the spirit of Egbert would yet have been left in the land; as it was, however, Alstan did his best—recruited the exchequer, raised a strong military force, and, though but feebly backed by his sovereign, he placed the country in an abler state of defence than it otherwise would have been, and was instrumental in baffling many of the daring incursions of the Danes. Every attack they now made became more formidable; they ventured up the largest rivers; pillaging all the towns they came near, and escaping with the spoil;—for four days, with a favourable wind, was time enough to sail from their own shores to the southern coast of Britain. At length, they began to think that the hours lost in voyaging to and fro might be turned to better account if

they settled down at once upon our coast; and in the year 851, they took up their winter quarters in the island of Thanet. There could now no longer remain any doubt of their intentions; they were treading in the very footsteps which Hengist and Horsa had left behind; they had taken possession of the soil.

The following spring, three hundred and fifty ships entered the Thames; London and Canterbury were plundered; the Danes marched onward into Mercia, defeated Bertulph, ravaged the country for miles, then turned round again and entered Surrey. Here, however, they found Ethelwulph, and his son Ethelbald, at the head of the West-Saxons, ready to receive them; and at Okely, or the Field of Oaks, as the spot was then called, the Saxons, after a hard fight, won the victory—such a desperate and deadly struggle had not taken place for many years in Britain; more than half of the Danish army perished in the field. Another son of Ethelwulph's had defeated the Danes at Sandwich, and captured nine of their ships. The men of Devonshire had also obtained a victory over them at Wenbury. Such was the consternation they had already spread, that every Wednesday was now set apart as a day of prayer, to implore the Divine aid against the Danes. Hitherto it had but been the muttering of the tempest, with a few flashes playing about the dark edges of the thunder-cloud; the terrible and desolating burst had yet to come. But there was now slowly growing up to manhood one who was soon destined to stand in the front of the storm—who was born to tread, sure-footed, through the rocking of the whirlwind;—to his boyish days will we now for a few moments turn aside.

The mother of Alfred was named Osberga; she was the daughter of Oslac, the king's cup-bearer—as ambassador of Ethelwulph, he signed the charter in which Wiglaf gave the monastery and lands of Croyland to the abbot Siward and his successors. Osberga was a lady celebrated for her piety and intellectual attainments, talents which could have been of but little service in the education of Alfred, for before he had reached his seventh year, Ethelwulph, in his old age, became enamoured of a youthful beauty—Judith, the daughter of Charles of France, and her he married, although there scarcely remains a doubt that Osberga was still living. It was on his return from Rome with the youthful Alfred, that Ethelwulph first became smitten with the princess Judith. We have shown that it was customary for the Saxon kings to make a pilgrimage to Rome, and as Ethelwulph

is said to have loved Alfred "better than his other sons," he had him introduced to the pope, and anointed with holy oil, although he was the youngest of all his children—a clear proof that he intended him to become his successor. The presents which Ethelwulph made to the pope were of the costliest description, and show that even at this early period the Saxon kings must have been in the possession of considerable wealth. They consisted of a crown of pure gold, which weighed four pounds, two vessels of the same material, two golden images, a sword adorned with pure gold, and four dishes of silver gilt, besides several valuable dresses. He also gave gold and silver to the priests, the nobles, and the people; rebuilt the school which Ina had founded, and which, by accident or carelessness, had been burnt down; and above all, procured an order from the pope, that no Englishman, while in Rome, whether an exile or a public penitent, should ever again be bound with iron bonds. When he returned to England with his girlish wife, and the youthful Alfred, he found his eldest son Ethelbald at the head of a rebellion, backed by his old friend bishop Alstan, and the earl of Somerset. The cause assigned for this insurrection was, that Ethelwulph had raised Judith to the dignity of queen, contrary to the law of Wessex, for, as we have before shown, the West Saxons had abolished that title, on account of the crimes committed by Edburga. The real cause, however, appears to have been a jealousy of the favour shown to Alfred. But Ethelwulph was now in his dotage, and as in his younger days he had never evinced much of a warlike spirit, he by the intercession of his nobles came to an amicable arrangement with his son, and after this survived about two years, leaving Ethelbald the crown, which he had been so eager to assume.

But neither crown, throne, nor sceptre, satisfied Ethelbald, unless he also possessed the young widow, Judith. It is said that she was but twelve years old when Ethelwulph married her, and that she had never been more to the old king than a companion. This, however, silenced not the clamour of the church, and Ethelbald is said to have dismissed her;—a point much doubted,—although it is clear enough that he did not survive his father above three years. The monkish writers attribute his short career to his unnatural marriage. Judith left England, and for a short time resided in France, in a convent near Senlis. While here, she captivated Baldwin, surnamed the Arm of Iron,

by whom she was carried off (nothing loth) and married. Her father, it is said, applied to the pope to excommunicate Baldwin, for having taken away a widow forcibly. But whether the pretty widow told another tale, or Baldwin had influence enough to reach the ear of the pontiff, or by whatever other means the matter was arranged, the pope took a very lenient view of the affair, and Judith's third marriage was solemnized with the full approbation of her father. Baldwin became earl of Flanders. The son of Judith, on a later day, married the daughter of Alfred the Great, from whom Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, afterwards descended, and from whom has come down our long race of English kings to the present time. The adventures of queen Judith, her marriages with Ethelwulph and his son, together with her elopement from the convent with Baldwin, the grand forester, are matters that still sleep amongst the early records of the olden time, and such as require the hand of a bold historian to bring them clearly before the public eye.

We are now reaching the border-land of more stirring times. Ethelbert succeeded his brother Ethelbald; and his short reign was disturbed by the repeated attacks of the Danes, who again wintered in the isle of Thanet, overran Kent, and extended their ravages to the eastern parts of the country. After a reign of six years, Ethelbert died, and Ethelred ascended the throne of Wessex;—during his reign, Alfred began to take an active part in the government. But we must now glance backward, and bring before our readers a few of the Danish leaders. Chief amongst the sea-kings who invaded England about this period, was Ragnar Lodbrog, whose celebrated death-song has been frequently translated, and is considered one of the oldest of the northern poems which we possess. It was this famous sea-king who led on that terrible expedition which overran France, and destroyed Paris. After this, he returned to Norway, and built two of the largest ships which had ever sailed upon the northern seas. These he filled with armed men, and boldly steered for the English shore. The art of navigation was then in its infancy; the mighty vessels which Ragnar had built he had no control over; they were thrown upon the coast of Northumberland, and wrecked. A Saxon king, named Ella, at this time ruled the northern kingdom, for Egbert had long before placed tributary sovereigns over all the states he conquered. The bold sea-king had no choice left to him, but either to plunder

or perish, no matter how powerful the enemy might be that came out against him; his ships were wrecked, and all means of escape cut off. With an overwhelming force compared with that of Ragnar, Ella met the sea-king, and though so unequally matched, the pirate and his followers behaved bravely. Four times did Ragnar rush into the opposing ranks, making an opening through them wherever he appeared. He saw his warriors perish around him one by one, until he alone was left alive out of all that daring band,—every soul, excepting himself, was slain in the combat. Ella took the brave sea-king prisoner, and, bleeding as he was with his wounds, shut him up in a deep dungeon, among live and venomous adders. The charmed mantle which his wife Aslauga had given him, had proved of no protection; and it was upon his death that the celebrated song, which we have before-mentioned, was composed. It has been attributed to the sea-king himself, though it is hardly possible that it could have been his own composition; for as he perished in the dungeon, it is not likely that his enemies would preserve a lay that set at defiance all their tortures, and triumphed over their former defeats. The following extracts will convey some idea of the ancient Scandinavian war-songs:—

“We struck with our swords, when in the flower of my youth I went out to prepare the banquet of blood for the wolves, when I sent the people from that great combat in crowds to the halls of Odin. Our lances pierced their cuirasses—our swords claved their bucklers.

“We struck with our swords, and hundreds lay around the horses of the island rocks—those great sea promontories of England. We chaunted the mass of spears with the uprising sun. The blood dropped from our swords; the arrows whistled in the air as they went in quest of the helmets. Oh! it was a pleasure to me, equal to what I felt when I first held my beautiful bride in my arms.

“We struck with our swords, on that day when I laid low the young warrior who prided himself on his long hair, and who had just returned that morning from wooing the beautiful girls. But what is the lot of a brave man but to die amongst the first? A wearisome life must he lead who is never wounded in the great game of battle—man must resist or attack.

“We struck with our swords! but now I feel that we follow the decrees of fate, and bow to the destiny of the dark spirits.

Never did I believe that from Ella the end of my life would come, when I urged my vessels over the waves—but we left along the bays of Scotland a banquet for the beasts of prey. Still it delights me to know that the seats of Odin are ready for the guests, and that there we shall drink ale out of large hollowed skulls. Then grieve not at death in the dread mansion of Fiolner.

“We struck with our swords! oh! if the sons of Aslauga but knew of my danger, they would draw their bright blades and rush to my rescue. How the venomous snakes now bite me. But the mother of my children is true; I gained her that they might have brave hearts. The staff of Vithris will soon stick in Ella’s heart. How the anger of my sons will swell when they know how their father was conquered. In the palace of my heart the envenomed vipers dwell.

“We struck with our swords! in fifty and one combats have I fought, and summoned my people by my warning-spear-messenger. There will be found few kings more famous than I. From my youth I loved to grasp the red spear. But the goddess invites me home from the hall of spoils; Odin has sent for me. The hours of my life are gliding away, and, laughing, I will die.”

The tidings of the terrible death of Ragnar were not long in travelling to the rocky coast of Norway; in every creek, and bay, and harbour, it resounded, and wherever a sea-king breathed around the Baltic, he swore on his bracelet of gold to revenge the death of the renowned chieftain; all petty expeditions were laid aside; Dane, Swede, and Norwegian, united like one man; and eight kings, and twenty jarls, or petty chieftains, all joined in the enterprise, at the head of which Ingwar and Hubba, the two sons of Ragnar, were placed; all the relations and friends of Ragnar, no matter how remote, swelled the force that had congregated to revenge his death.

Although this mighty fleet was directed towards Northumbria, by some chance it passed the coast, and came to anchor on the shores of East Anglia. No one in England was apprized of its approach. Ethelred had not been long seated on the throne of Wessex, and Northumbria was still shaken by internal revolutions; for Osbert, who had been expelled by Ella from the Deiri, was now making preparations to regain the kingdom. The Danes did not, however, commence hostilities so soon as they

landed, but quietly over-awing the country by their mighty force, they took up their winter-quarters within their intrenchments, and moored their vessels along the shore. They demanded a supply of horses; the king of East Anglia furnished them; he intruded not upon their encampment, neither did they molest him. The rest of the Saxon states looked calmly on, trusting that the tempest would burst where it had gathered, and that they should escape the terrible storm; but they were doomed to be disappointed. With the first warm days of Spring, the whole Danish host was in motion; such an army had never before overrun the British island. The sons of Ragnar strode sullenly onward at its head. They halted not until they reached York, the metropolis of the Deira; they swept through the city in their devastating march, leaving sorrow, and slaughter, and death, to mark their footsteps; destroying all before them as they passed, until they reached the banks of the Tyne. Osbert and Ella had by this time become united, and began to advance at the head of a large army, which numbered amongst its commanders eight earls. The Danes had again fallen back upon York, and near the outskirts of that city were first attacked by the Northumbrians. The assault was so sudden that the pagans were compelled to fly into the city for shelter. Flushed with this temporary victory, the Saxons began to pull down the city walls, and once within its streets, the Danes then rose up, and fell upon the Northumbrians, whom they cut down with terrible slaughter—nearly the whole of the Saxon army perished. Ella fell alive into their hands, and horribly did the sons of Ragnar revenge their father's death. All the tortures which cruelty could devise, they inflicted upon him. So decisive was the victory, that Northumbria never again became a Saxon kingdom, but was ruled over with an iron hand by one of the sons of Ragnar. The work of vengeance could go no further; they had put the king to a lingering and agonizing death, and having desolated his kingdom, one of the sons of the terrible sea-king, whose spirit they had appeased, sat down upon the vacant throne, and, from the Tyne unto the Humber, reigned the undisputed sovereign. Thus was the death of Ragnar revenged. Having once taken possession of the kingdom, the Danes began to fortify York, and to strengthen the principal towns in the neighbourhood. From Northumberland to the shores of the Humber they strengthened their great mustering ground, and made it a rally-

ing point for all the sea-kings who had courage enough to brave the perils of the Baltic, and venture their lives, like the sons of Ragnar, for a kingdom. All who had aided in revenging the death of Ragnar, now invited their kindred and followers over to England. They came in shoals, until Northumbria was filled like an overstocked hive that awaits a favourable opportunity to swarm.

That deep buzzing was soon heard which denoted that they were ready to swarm, for there was now no longer room for so many. The dark cloud passed with a humming sound through the Deiri, along the pleasant valley of the Trent, through the wild forest of Sherwood, whose old oaks then stood in all their primitive grandeur, until they saw before them the walls of Nottingham rising high above their rocky foundation. The inhabitants fled into the surrounding forest, or hurried over the Trent into the adjoining county of Lincolnshire, where Burrhed, the king of Mercia, resided. Alarmed by the rumour of such an host, the Mercian king sent into Wessex for assistance; and Ethelred, joined by his brother Alfred, who was now slowly rising, like a star on the rim of the horizon, hastened with their united armies to assist the Mercian king. But the Danes were too strongly entrenched within the walls of Nottingham to be driven out by the combined forces of Mercia and Wessex. The Saxons, well aware of the strength of these fortifications, were compelled to encamp without the walls, for the tall rocky barriers on which the castle yet stands, and the precipitous and cavernous heights which still look down upon the river Lene, formed strong natural barriers from which the Danish sentinels could look down with triumph, and defy the assembled host that lay encamped at their feet. After some delay, a treaty was entered into between the contending armies, and the Danes agreed to fall back upon York; the river Idel, which is so narrow that the points of two long lances would meet, if held by a tall chieftain on either shore, was the slender barrier that divided the opposing nations; a roe-buck from a rising summit could readily overleap it, and in an hundred places it was fordable. Ethelred and his brother Alfred, (who had now numbered about nineteen years,) led back their army into Wessex, and allowed the Danes to pursue their way quietly into Deiri. This forbearance is greatly censured by the early historians, but we must bear in mind that Alfred was not yet king, and that Ethelred but came

up as an ally on the side of Mercia. He who was destined to become the greatest sovereign that ever sat upon the English throne, was at this period one of the most daring followers of the chase, for, although he was from childhood a martyr to a painful disease, yet where the antlered monarch of the forest led the way, there was Alfred to be seen foremost amongst the hunters. Young as he was, he had already married a Mercian lady, called Ealswitha, and some portion of Wessex was allotted to him, probably such as had been held by his father Ethelwulph, when the subjects rebelled on account of his step-mother Judith. Slightly as we have passed by this frail fair lady, Alfred was greatly indebted to her; she first tempted him to read when he was only twelve years of age; but for her he might, like his brothers, have remained in ignorance. She first pointed out the path which guided him to the literature of Rome; he had trod the streets of the "eternal city," and his wise laws tell us the use he made of his learning.

We are compelled to drag the great king bit by bit before our readers, lest we should startle them by his too sudden appearance; for he seems to rise above the age in which he lived with an unnatural majesty—there is no relief near to where he stands, no neighbouring summit which he might descend that would seem to lessen his giant form in its shadow;—bold and bare and giant-like his god-imaged figure heaves up, and with its mighty shadow eclipses the very sunset which, though ever sinking, leaves not in gloom the bright form that makes the "darkness visible" by which it is surrounded.

CHAPTER XX.

RAVAGES OF THE DANES—DEATH OF ETHELRED.

“We look in vain for those old ruins now,
For the green grass waves o’er that ample floor,
And where the altar stood rank nettles grow;
None mourned its fall more than the neighbouring poor,
They passed its ruins sighing, day by day,
And missed the beadsman in his hood of gray,
Who never bade the hungry turn away.”—THE OLD ABBEY.

SPRING, that gives such life and beauty to the landscape, but aroused the Danes to new aggressions, and they this time marched into the opposite division of Mercia, crossing the Humber and the Trent, and landing in that part of Lincolnshire which is still called Lindsey, where they spread death and desolation wherever they passed. From north to south they swept onward like a destroying tempest; the busy hamlet, the happy home, and the growing harvest, all vanished beneath their footsteps. Where in the morning sunshine, the pleasant village, and the walled town, stood upon the high cliffs and overlooked the wild wold and reedy marish; the dim twilight dropped down upon a waste of smoking ruins, and blackened ashes, while such of the inhabitants as escaped the merciless massacre, either sheltered in the gloomy wood, where “the grey wolf of the weald” had its lair, or in the sedgy swamp where the wild swan built, and the black water-hen went paddling onward before her dusky and downy young ones. Wherever a church or a monastery stood up amid the scenery, thitherward the Danes directed their steps, for to slaughter the priest at the altar, and carry their clamorous war-cry into the choir, where they changed the hymning of the psalter into the groans and shrieks of agonised death, was to them a delight, equal to that of the heaven which they hoped to inhabit hereafter. But sack, slay, burn, and destroy, are words which but faintly describe the ravages of these Northern pagans, that fall upon the ear with an indistinct meaning; and it is only by following them step by step, and bringing their deeds before the eye of the reader, that we can throw the moving shadows of these savage sea-kings for a moment upon

our pages. Having ravaged the district of Lindsey, destroyed the beautiful monastery of Bardney, and killed every monk they found within its walls, they crossed the Witham, and entered that division of Lincolnshire which is called Kesteven—here a stand was made against them. The earl of Algar, with his two officers, Wibert and Leofric, mustered together the inhabitants who dwelt around the wild and watery neighbourhood of Croyland, and being joined by the forces which Osgot the sheriff of Lincoln had collected, and aided by a monk who had once been a famous warrior, and now cast aside his cowl to don a heavy helmet, they sallied forth in the September of 868, and gave battle to the Danes. After a sharp contest, in which three of the sea-kings were slain, the men of Mercia drove the pagans into their intrenchments, nor did they cease from assailing them in their stronghold until darkness had settled down upon the land. But a thousand men, though backed by so good a cause, were sure to fall at last before such a mighty and overwhelming host as the invaders presented.

It so chanced that during the day, when the handful of brave Saxons were victorious, the Danish forces had divided, but in the night the division, which had been delayed by their work of destruction, entered the camp, into which the defeated force had been driven. Thus, by daylight, the pagan army was more than doubled. Amongst these new comers were the two sea-kings who had taken such terrible vengeance on Ella, for the death of their father, Ragnar. The arrival of such a force spread great consternation amongst the little band of Saxons, who were encamped without the Danish intrenchments, and many of the peasants fled during the night to their homes—the brave only remained behind to die. In the early dawn of that bygone Autumn morning, the Danes arose and buried the three sea-kings who had fallen the day before in battle. The Saxons looked calmly on, but moved not, until the solemn ceremony was ended: the savage Hubba was present at that funeral. Algar stood ready, with his little force drawn up in the form of a wedge; he placed himself and his officers in the centre, confided the right wing to the monk Toliús, and the left to the sheriff of Lincoln; they planted their shields so closely together, that each one touched its fellow; they held their strong projecting spears pointing outward with a firm grasp, for they knew that their safety depended upon being thus banded together, and thus, awaiting

the attack, the solid wedge-like triangle stood. Leaving behind a sufficient force to protect their encampment, which was filled with plunder and captives, the remainder of the Danes, headed by four kings and eight jarls or earls, sallied forth to give battle to the Saxons. The first shock was terrible, but it broke not the well-formed phalanx, though it jarred along the lines like a chain that is struck; for a moment each link swung, there was a waving motion along the ranks, then the horsemen recoiled again, for the line was still unbroken. The Danish javelins penetrated only the shields, the horses shrank back from the piercing points of the Saxon spears. Savage Hubba could not get near enough to strike with his heavy battle-axe—the morning-star, which made bright flashes around the head of Ingwar as he wielded it, swung harmless before that bristling forest of steel.

Upon the lonely moors and the damp marshes a dim mist began to gather, and along the distant ridge where the wild forest stretched far away, the evening shadows began to fall, when the Danes, wearied and enraged at being so long repulsed, made another attack;—then wheeling round, feigned a defeat. In vain was the warning voice of the earl of Algar raised; in vain did the monk intreat of them, by the name of every blessed saint in the calendar, to stand firm; it was too late—the little band was broken—they were off in the pursuit—the Danes were flying before them—and onward they rushed, making the air resound again with the shouts of victory. Suddenly the Danish force turned upon their pursuers. Hubba made a circle with his cavalry to the right; to the left the centre came back like an overwhelming wave, and the Saxons were surrounded. All was lost. Neither the skill of Algar nor the bravery of Toliús were now of any avail; there was nothing left but to stand side by side, and to fight until they fell. But few of that brave band escaped; those who did, availed themselves of the approaching darkness, and plunging into the adjoining forest, hastened to the distant monastery of Croyland, to publish their own defeat.

It was the hour of matins, when, pale, weary, and breathless, two or three of the Saxon youths who had escaped from the scene of slaughter, rushed into the choir of the monastery with the tidings that all excepting themselves had perished. The abbot uplifted his hand to command silence when he saw them enter, and the solemn anthem in a moment ceased. He then bade the monks who were young and strong, to take a boat, and carry off the relics of the saints, the sacred vessels,

jewels, books, and charters, and all the moveable articles of value, and either to bury them in the marshes, or sink them beneath the waters of the lake, until the storm had passed over. "As for myself," added the abbot, "I will remain here, with the old men and children, and peradventure, by the mercy of God, they may take pity on our weakness." The children were such as at that period were frequently brought up, by the consent of their parents, in the habits of a monastic life, and who in their early years sung in the choir:—amongst the old monks were two whose years outnumbered an hundred. Alas! the venerable abbot might as well have looked for mercy from a herd of ravenous and howling wolves, that came, gaunt, grey, and hungry, from the snow-covered wintry forest, as from the misbelieving Danes, who were then fast approaching. All was done as he commanded; the most valuable treasures were rowed across the lake to the island of Thorns, and in the wood of Ancarig, those who were not brave enough to abide the storm found shelter. One rich table plated with gold, that formed a portion of the great altar, rose to the surface, and as they could not sink it, it was taken back, and again restored to its place in the monastery.

Meantime the flames which shone redly between the forest-trees, told that the last village had been fired; every moment brought nearer the clamour of the assailants, until at last the tramp of horses could be distinctly heard: then the ominous banner on which the dusky raven was depicted hove in sight, and the whole mass came up with a deep, threatening murmur, which drowned the voice of the abbot and the monks, and the little children, as they continued to chaunt the psalter in the monastery. At the foot of the altar, in his sacerdotal robes, was the abbot hewn down; the grey hairs of the venerable priests protected them not—those who rushed out of the choir were pursued and slaughtered; there was scarcely a slab on the floor of the sacred edifice that was not slippery with blood. Some were tortured to make them confess where their treasures were concealed, and afterwards beheaded, for the Danes acted more like fiends, let loose to do the work of destruction, than like men. There was one exception on that dreadful day—one human life was saved by the intervention of a Dane, and but for him every soul would have perished. The prior had been struck down early in the massacre by the battle-axe of Hubba; as he lay dead

upon the pavement, a little boy about ten years of age clung to him and wept bitterly, for he had been greatly attached to the prior. The slaughter was still going on, when Sidroc, one of the sea-kings, paused with the uplifted sword in his hand to gaze on the boy, who knelt weeping beside the dead body of the prior. Struck by his beautiful and innocent countenance, the Danish chief took off his cassock, and throwing it around the little chorister, said, "Quit not my side for a moment." He alone was saved—excepting those who had previously fled with the boat and the treasures. Disappointed at finding neither gold nor jewels, the pagans broke open the tombs, and scattered around the bones of the dead, and as there was no longer any one at hand to slay, they set fire to the monastery. Laden with cattle and plunder, they next proceeded to Peterborough, burning and slaying, and destroying whatever they met with on their march.

The abbey of Peterborough was considered at this time as one of the finest ecclesiastical edifices in England. It was built in the solid Saxon style, with strong stunted pillars, crypts, vaulted passages, oratories, and galleries, while the thick massy walls were pierced with circular windows, and contained the finest library which had ever been collected together in Britain; the gift of many a pilgrim who had visited the still proud capital of Italy. The doors of this famous building were so strong that for some time they resisted the attacks of the Danes, and as the monks and their retainers had resolved to defend themselves as long as they could, neither the besieged nor the besiegers remained idle. From the circular windows, and the lofty roof of the abbey, the monks and their allies threw down heavy stones, and hurled their sharp javelins at the enemy, who had hitherto endeavoured in vain to break open the ponderous doors. At last the brother of Hubba was struck to the earth by a stone, and carried wounded into his tent.

This act seemed to redouble the fierce energy of the Danes, and in a few minutes after they drove in the massy gates. In revenge for the wound his brother had received, the brutal Hubba, with his own hand, put eighty-four monks to death;—he demanded to be the chief butcher on the occasion, and the request was freely granted him. The child whom Sidroc had rescued from death at Croyland stood by and witnessed that savage slaughter, and the friend who had saved him stooped

down, and whispering in his ear, bade him not approach too near Hubba. The boy, as we shall see, needed not a second warning. All who had aided in defending the monastery, excepting the few who escaped at the commencement of the attack, were put to death. The library was burnt, the sepulchres broken open, and the abbey fired; and for nearly fifteen days was that noble edifice burning, before it was totally consumed. Many a deed and charter, and valuable manuscript, which would have thrown a light on the manners and customs of that period, were consumed in the flames.

Laden with spoil, the merciless pagans next marched towards Huntingdon. Sidroc had charge of the rear-guard, which brought up the plunder. Two of the cars, containing the spoil of the monastery, were overturned in a deep pool, while passing a river, and as the sea-king lingered behind, and was busily engaged in superintending his soldiers, and aiding them to save all they could from the wreck, the child who had witnessed such scenes of bloodshed took advantage of the confusion, and escaped. Having concealed himself in a wood until the faint and far-off sounds of the Danish army had died away, he set off across the wild marshes alone, and in the course of a day and a night found his way back again to Croyland. Poor little fellow! the smoking ruins and the weeping monks, who had returned from their hiding-place in the island of Thorns, and who were then wailing over their murdered brethren, were the melancholy sights and sounds that greeted his return home;—a stern school was that for a child of ten years old to be nursed in! He told them all he had witnessed at Peterborough; they gathered around him to listen; they ceased to throw water on the burning ruins until his tale was ended; they left the headless body of their venerable abbot beneath the mighty beam which had fallen across it, nor attempted to extricate it until he had finished "his sad, eventful history." Then it was that they again wept aloud, throwing themselves upon the ground in their great anguish, until grief had no longer any tears, and the sobbing of sorrow had settled down into hopeless silence. That over, they again commenced their sad duty: the huge grave was deepened, the dead and mutilated bodies were dragged from under the burning ruins, and placing the abbot on the top of the funeral pile, they left them in one grave, covered beneath the same common earth, to sleep that sleep which no startling dream can ever disturb.

Scarcely was this melancholy duty completed, before the few monks who had escaped from the massacre of Peterborough made their appearance. They had come all that way for assistance, for, excepting themselves, there were none left alive to help to bury their murdered brethren, on whose bodies the wolves from the woods, they said, were already feeding. With heads bent, and weeping eyes, and breaking hearts, those poor monks had moved mournfully along, leaving the wolves to feed upon their butchered brothers beside the blackened ruins of their monastery, until they could find friends who would help them to drag the half-consumed remains from beneath the burning rafters, place them side by side, and, without distinction, bury them in one common and peaceful grave. How clearly we can picture that grave group on their journey! their subdued conversation by the way, of the dead, whose good deeds they discussed, or whose vices they left untouched, as they recalled their terrible ending; the country through which they passed, desolate; the inhabitants, who were wont to come on holy-days to worship, fled; a hamlet here reduced to ashes, there a well-known form, half consumed, stretched across the blackened threshold. We can picture the wolf stealing away until they had passed; the raven, with his iron and ominous note, making a circle round their heads, then returning to the mother or the infant, half hidden in the sedge beside the mere, or with her long hair floating loose amongst the water-flags, amid which she was stabbed as she ran shrieking, with the infant at her breast. Wherever they turned their eyes, there would they behold desolation, and death, and decay,—see homes which the fire had consumed, in ruins; or where the children had escaped, witness them weeping beside the roofless walls, fatherless, motherless, hopeless; for such was the England of those days, over which the destroying sea-kings passed. Let us, however, hope, that there were a few like Sidroc amongst them; that the raven and the wolf were not their only attendants, but that the angel of mercy, though concealed in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night, was still there, and though unseen, many a time stretched forth his hand to rescue. It is painful to picture such scenes as our history presents at this period; they are all either soaked through with the blood of the slain, or black and crackled with the scorching flames which have passed over them. It makes us shudder to think what they who once lived and moved as we

now do, must have endured; while, after the lapse of nearly a thousand years, we cannot portray their sufferings without sympathizing with their sorrows, and experiencing a low, heart-aching sensation. The grave that covers up and buries the past, inters not all pain and sorrow with the dead, but leaves a portion behind, that the living may feel what they once suffered—the agonizing shriek, and the heart-rending cry, ring for ages after upon our ears;—such sounds disturb not the silent chambers of the dead!

The Danes now proceeded to march into East Anglia, a kingdom whose inland barrier was marked by vast sheets of water that set in from the Wash, and went winding away into the low marshes of Cambridge, far away beyond Ely, over a country above an hundred miles in extent. Along this boggy and perilous course did the pagans advance with their plunder, their cars, and their cavalry; razing the monastery of Ely to the ground as they passed, nor pausing until they came to the residence of the king of East Anglia, which stood beside a river that then divided Suffolk from Norfolk. When the Danish king came in sight of Edmund's residence, he sent him a message, commanding him to divide his treasures with him; also bidding the messenger to tell the East Anglian king that it was useless to oppose a nation whom the storms of the ocean favoured—whom the tempests served as rowers, and the lightning came down to guide, that they might in dark nights escape the rocks. They gave the Saxon king but little time for hesitation before they dragged him forth, and bound him to a tree. They had no words to waste: slaughter was their work, and they commenced it at once. They began by shooting arrows at his limbs, without injuring the body; but finding that they could neither get him to confess their superiority, nor show any symptom of fear, Ingwar at last uplifted his heavy battle-axe, and severed the head at a blow. Thus, East Anglia, like a portion of Northumbria, became a Danish province; and Godrun, a celebrated sea-king, whom we shall again meet during the reign of Alfred, was placed upon the throne.

Their next step was towards Wessex; for they well knew that if they could but once conquer that kingdom, the dominions of Mercia would become an easy prey, as these were the only two Saxon states that seemed able to withstand them. Wessex, as we have shown, was much enlarged since the first

formation of the octarchy, and was soon destined to swallow up for ever the kingdom of Mercia; for Burrhed was not competent to stand long at the helm and steer safely through such a storm as surrounded him. Having reached Berkshire, the Northmen took possession of Reading without opposition, when they at once sent out a strong body of cavalry to plunder, while the remainder of the army commenced throwing up an intrenchment to strengthen their position. Scarcely had they time to complete this work before the West Saxons attacked them; and though at the first they seem to have had the best of the battle, they were in the end compelled to retreat, and leave the invaders masters of the field. At the second attack, both Ethelred and Alfred were present; they led up the strongest array that could be mustered;—to every town, thorpe, and grange, war-messengers had been despatched with the naked sword and arrow in their hands, uttering the ancient proclamation, which none had hitherto disobeyed, and which bade “each man to leave his house and land, and come;” the mustering ground was near *Æscesdun*, or Ash-tree Hill. The Danes divided their army into two bodies, each of which was commanded by two kings and two earls. Ethelred followed the example they had set him, giving the command of one division of his army to Alfred. As the Danes had been the first to form into battle order, so did they commence the attack; and although they had the advantage of the rising ground, Alfred, nothing daunted, led his forces in close order up the ascent to meet them. Near the hoar ash-tree the contending ranks closed, and there many a Dane and Saxon fell, who never more passed that barrier until they were borne away on the bier. Although Ethelred had heard the war-cry, and knew that the battle had commenced, he refused to leave his tent until his priest had finished the prayer which he was offering up, when the Danes first charged down the hill-side. By the time it was ended, Alfred, with his inferior force, though fighting their way foot to foot, were slowly losing ground, and but for the timely appearance of Ethelred, and the division under his command, he must have retreated. As it was, however, the sudden arrival of such a strong force changed the fortune of the day. One of the sea-kings fell; and beside him, Sidroc, who had saved the child from the massacre of Croyland; then the Danish ranks began to waver, for thousands of the invaders had already fallen. But the carnage ended not here: all night long

did the Saxons chase their pagan enemies, until, towards the evening of the next day, and from the foot of the hill where the battle was fought—far away over the fields of Ashdown, and over the country that now lies beside Ashbury, up to the very intrenchment at Reading—was the whole line of road strewn with the dying and the dead;—there the massacre of Croyland and Peterborough was revenged, and for days after the bodies of the Danes lay blackening in the sun. But terrible as was the slaughter, and complete the victory, a fortnight saw the Northmen again in the field, strengthened by reinforcements, who had landed upon the coast, and by these were the Saxons, in their turn, defeated. In the next battle that was fought between them, Ethelred received his death wound; and Alfred the Great ascended the throne of Wessex. Over the threshold of this perilous period must we now pass, to the presence of one of England's greatest kings.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCESSION AND ABDICATION OF ALFRED.

"In fortune's love—then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seem all affin'd and kin;—
But in the wind and tempest of her frown,
Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away."—SHAKSPERE.

ALFRED was scarcely twenty-two years of age when he ascended the throne of Wessex—it was on the eve of a defeat when the sceptre fell into his hands—when the Danes were flushed with victory, and nearly all England lay prostrate at their feet. With such a gloomy prospect before him, we can easily account for the reluctance he showed in accepting the crown, although it was offered to him by all the chiefs and earls who formed the witenagemot, when there were children of his elder brother Ethelbald alive, who, according to the Saxon order of succession, were the next heirs to the crown. But the Wessex nobles were

already well acquainted with Alfred's talents, for during the twelve months prior to his accession, he had distinguished himself in eight pitched battles against the Danes, and had fought in many an unrecorded skirmish against parties of the enemy who were sent out to forage. Alfred well knew that the death of Ethelred would hardly leave him breathing-time, before he should again be compelled to take the field; that he also had to fight under the disadvantage which necessarily attends a defeat; while the enemy came swelling in all the triumph of recent victory; that he had to repair his late losses, and rouse afresh his subjects, who were still smarting with the wounds they had received from their conquerors, while the invaders were made more daring by every conquest, and more insolent by every concession. Such was the state of the kingdom into which Alfred was ushered by the death of his brother: nor was this all—he no doubt, with his clear eye, saw that it was no longer a mere struggle between two parties, where the one seeks to plunder, and the other to protect his property, but a contest for the very land on which they fought. The Danes had ceased to trust for safety to their “sea-horses”—they had abandoned “the road of the swans,” they but travelled over it to a land in which their countrymen were now kings, where their brethren were in the possession of cities and lands—they came to share in the inheritance of the soil—either to find their future homes, or their graves in England. The prize each party was now contending for, was England itself—it was neither more nor less than to decide whether our island should in future be ruled over by the Danes, or the Saxons. It was but what the Romans had before-time aspired to, and what, after a hard struggle, the Saxons themselves had accomplished. Well might Alfred despair when he looked at his shattered army, and saw how small a portion of England he possessed.

What had he gained by the eight hard-fought battles he shared in the year before his accession to the crown? The places of those whom he had helped to hew down were filled up again by the first favourable wind that blew towards his ill-starred kingdom; as the grave closed over the dead, the sea threw another living shoal upon the coast—none returned—if they retreated, it was but to some neighbouring intrenchment, or some kingdom over which a sea-king reigned. Alfred had not sat upon the throne of Wessex a month, before his army was attacked, at

Wilton, during his absence, and defeated by the Northmen. Wearied of a war which only brought victory to-day, to be followed by defeat on the morrow, he made peace with his enemies, and they left the kingdom of Wessex, though on what terms we know not, unless it was that Alfred agreed not to assist the king of Mercia, as his brother Ethelred had frequently done. It would almost appear by their marching at once into Mercia, that such were the conditions on which they quitted Wessex.

Nine battles in one year must have made a sad opening amongst the West Saxons, for, unlike the Danes, they had no ships constantly arriving upon the coast to fill up the places of those that were slain. Oh, how the young king must have yearned for retirement, and his books! when he looked round and saw the miserable and almost defenceless state of his kingdom—his brave warriors dropping off daily, and none to close the gap that was left open in his ranks. Let us leave him for a brief space—his heart heavy, his soul sad, and his head resting upon his hand, with not a ray of hope to cheer him, excepting his trust in God—while we follow the footsteps of the Danes.

That part of the Danish army which abandoned Wessex took up its winter quarters in London, at about the same time that another portion of the invaders marched from Northumbria, and wintered at Repton, in Derbyshire, where they sacked and destroyed the beautiful monastery, which for above two centuries had been the burial-place of the Mercian kings; and, as at Croyland and Peterborough, they broke open the sepulchres and scattered abroad the ashes of the Saxon monarchs. Twice had Burrhed, the king of Mercia, negotiated with these truce-breakers, as the old chroniclers called them, and finding that they paid no regard to their oaths, and wearied with such a repetition of conflicts, Burrhed quitted his throne, went to Rome, where he died, and left his subjects to struggle on, or perish, as they best could. Instead of placing one of their own kings upon the throne of Mercia, the Danes gave the crown to Ceolwulf, under the stipulation that he should pay them tribute, and assist them with his forces whenever he was called upon; and that when he ceased to fulfil these conditions, he should from that moment resign his power. It would almost appear that there was so little left in the kingdom of Mercia worth their taking that they left him to gather up the remainder of the spoil, while they turned their attention to more substantial plunder; but his

reign was short: he was hated by those by whom he was employed, as well as by those whom he plundered, for he robbed alike the peasant, the merchant, the clergy, and even on the remnant of the poor monks of Croyland, whose brethren had been slain, and whose abbey had been destroyed, regardless of their losses and their sufferings, he imposed a tax of a thousand pounds. But in spite of this stern severity, he soon grew into disfavour with his new masters, was stripped of everything, and perished miserably. After his death, Mercia never existed again as a kingdom, but was blotted out for ever from the Saxon octarchy as a distinct state; and in an after day, when the power of the invaders began to wane, it was united by Alfred to Wessex, never again to exist as a separate province.

The arena of England was now only occupied by two powers; on the one hand, by Alfred, with his little kingdom and his mere handful of West Saxons: on the other, by the Danes, who were in possession of nearly the whole of the remainder of the island—for, with the exception of the kingdom of Wessex, all the rest of the Saxon states were in the hands of the invaders.

Three of the Danish sea-kings, named Godrun, Oskitul, and Amund, having, with their army, wintered at Cambridge, set out again, early in the spring, to attack Wessex; to give Alfred another proof how useless it was by either treaty or concession to hope to put off the evil day. This time they brought a large force to oppose him, and besides crossing the country, they sailed round by Dorsetshire, where they stormed the castle of Wareham; and though Alfred destroyed their ships, those who passed inland devastated the country for miles around. Alfred seems at this period to have grown weary of war, to have lost all heart and hope, and, for the first time, he purchased peace of them with gold; nor was he long before he had to repent of such timid policy, for although they swore as usual upon their bracelets, and even, at his request, pledged themselves solemnly upon the relics of the Christian saints, yet only a few nights after this useless ceremony, they rushed upon his encampment, slew a great portion of his cavalry, and, carrying off the horses, mounted their own soldiers upon them, and rode off to Exeter, where they passed the following winter. Though weary and dispirited, Alfred did not remain idle, but commenced building larger ships and galleys, so that he might be better able to compete with his enemies upon the ocean.

Such a plan, had it been pursued earlier by the Saxon kings, would have caused thousands of the Northmen to have found their graves in the ocean ere their feet touched our coast; but now the whole land behind him was filled with enemies, from the edge of the Channel, which his own kingdom overlooked, deep down, and far inland, to where the green lands of England stretched unto the Frith of Forth. Hopeless as it now was, Alfred boldly sallied forth with his ships, to encounter a fleet of Northmen off the Hampshire coast, where, having suffered much damage in a previous storm, the Danes were defeated, with the loss of one hundred and twenty of their ships. Emboldened by this success, Alfred collected his army and went forth to attack the Danes in their stronghold at Exeter. Here, however, instead of renewing the assault, and turning to advantage the victory which he had obtained at sea, he contented himself with a few hostages, and a renewal of the oaths, which his experience ought to have taught him they would break on the first favourable occasion, and allowed them once more to depart into Mercia. We can only account for this strange conduct on the part of Alfred by believing that the population of Wessex had been greatly thinned by the rapid succession of battles which had been fought at the close of the reign of Ethelred.

We now arrive at the most unaccountable action in the life of this great king, the abdication of his throne, and desertion of his subjects. His real cause for acting in this strange manner (unless some new and authentic document should be brought to light) will never be known. In the January of 878, the Danes attacked Chippenham; it is not clearly proved that Alfred struck a single blow; all we really know for truth is that many of the West Saxons fled, some of them quitting England, that Alfred was nowhere to be found, not even by his most intimate friends. These are historical truths, too clearly proved to remain for a moment doubtful. The cause we will as carefully examine as if the great Saxon king stood on his trial before us, for the honour of Alfred is dear to every Englishman, for though dead "he yet speaketh" in the wise laws he has bequeathed to us.

We know, from many authorities, that when the Danes invaded Wessex in January, numbers of the inhabitants fled. The effect such conduct would produce on a sensitive mind like

Alfred's, it is easy to picture; his sensations would be a minglement of pity, contempt, and disgust, and his proud heart would inwardly feel that they knew not how to value him aright; that if left to themselves for a little time they would then know how to estimate the king they had lost. We could fill a chapter with good, tangible reasons, showing why Alfred acted as he did, and yet we should, probably, after all, fall far short of the true cause. It might be injured pride, stern necessity, or the very despair which drives men to retire from the contest, to wait for better days. There is one undeniable point clearly in his favour, he did not retreat to enjoy a life of luxury and ease, but to endure one of hardship, privation, and suffering. In this he still remained the great and noble-hearted king. Asser, who loved him, clearly proves that Alfred, at this time, laboured under a low, desponding, and melancholy feeling. His words are, "He fell often into such misery that none of his subjects knew what had befallen him."

Surely no king had ever greater cause to feel unhappy; the man who, day after day, struggles on, and still finds matters worse on the morrow, becomes weary of the ever-flickering rays of hope, grows desperate, and plunges amongst the deepest shadows of despair; others, again, through very despondency, fold their arms, and wait until the worst comes, as if a fatality overwhelmed them, for all human perseverance hath its limits; these once passed, men become believers in inevitable destiny. To these Alfred, at this time, probably belonged.

It appears that Alfred did not desert his subjects before they deserted him; and after the many battles that were fought within the year which saw him king of Wessex, we can readily conceive he had not a single soldier to spare. He is accused, by those who knew him well, who conversed with him frequently, and saw him daily, of having been high, haughty, and severe; in a word, of looking down with contempt upon those around him. This is a grave charge; but where, with one or two exceptions, could he in his whole kingdom find a kindred mind to his own? Asser loved him, but he was an exception. His relation, Neot, rebuked him, and a young king would but ill brook lecturing. His chiefs or earls were brave, but illiterate men, not even fit companions for his own cabinet; for he was familiar with the forms of government in

civilized Rome and classic Greece; and, excepting when engaged in the battle-field, there could be no reciprocal feeling between them. These were the sharp and forbidding angles that time was sure to smooth down; but the Saxon nobles could not comprehend how they ever came to exist—they did not understand him. There is nothing new in this—it occurs every day. Let a man of superior intelligence rise up in a meeting of unlettered boors, and he will find some amongst the herd ready to oppose him, and these generally the least ignorant of the mass, but jealous of one whose capabilities stretch so far beyond their own. Who knows how many heart-burnings of this kind he had to endure, when assembled with his barbarous councillors—His mind was not their mind, his thoughts soared far above their understanding. Where they believed they distinguished the right, he would at a glance discover palpable wrong; where they doubted, he had long before come to a clear conviction. And no marvel that he at times treated their ignorant clamours with contempt, for he appears to have been as decided and hasty as he was intelligent and brave. He was young. The children of his eldest brother were now men, and from their high station would take an active part in the government. According to the order of Saxon succession, one of these ought to have sat upon the throne of Wessex. Who more likely than they to oppose his wise plans—to thwart him when he was anxiously labouring for the good of his subjects? All that has been brought against him but proves that he was hasty in his temper, high and haughty, and unbending when in the right; and somewhat severe in the administration of justice, especially upon those whom he had appointed as judges, when he found them guilty of tampering with it for selfish ends.

It will be borne in mind, that after Alfred had compelled the Danes to abandon Exeter, they retired into Mercia, where, in the autumn, they were joined by a strong force of Northmen, another cloud of those “locusts of the Baltic.” They entered Wessex at the close of the year, and in January had taken up their winter quarters at Chippenham in Wiltshire, it would almost appear, without meeting any opposition; for very little dependence can be placed on the account of Alfred having been attacked while celebrating Christmas there; of numbers being slaughtered on both sides, and Alfred escaping alone in the night. No mention has been made of such a battle in the records

which were written during Alfred's life, and which have descended to us. All we know for a certainty is, that on the approach of the Danes, many of the inhabitants fled in terror, some to the Isle of Wight, others into France; while numbers went over to Ireland. It is at this time that we find Alfred himself absent from his kingdom. "Such became his distress," says Turner, quoting from the old chronicles, "that he knew not where to turn; such was his poverty, that he had even no subsistence but that which by furtive or open plunder he could extort, not merely from the Danes, but even from those of his subjects who submitted to their government, or by fishing and hunting obtain. He wandered about in woods and marshes in the greatest penury, with a few companions; sometimes, for greater secresy, alone. He had neither territory, nor for a time the hope of regaining any."

Near to that spot where the rivers Thone and Parret meet, there is a beautiful tract of country, which still retains its old Saxon name of Athelney, now diversified by corn and pasture lands; but at the time of Alfred, according to the description in the Life of St. Neot, written at that period, "it was surrounded by marshes, and so inaccessible, that no one could get to it, but by a boat; it had also a great wood of alders, which contained stags, goats, and many animals of that kind. Into this solitude Alfred had wandered, where, seeing the hut of a peasant, he turned to it, asked, and received shelter." It was in this hut that the incident occurred between the cowherd's wife and Alfred, which is so familiar to every reader of English history. We quote Asser's description, for there is no doubt that he gave it nearly literally, as he heard it from king Alfred's own lips: "It happened, that on a certain day the rustic wife of this man prepared to bake her bread; the king, sitting then near the hearth, was making ready his bows and arrows, and other warlike instruments, when the rough-tempered woman beheld the loaves burning at the fire. She ran hastily and removed them, scolding the king, and exclaiming: 'You man! you will not turn the bread you see burning, but you will be very glad to eat it when done.' This unlucky woman little thought," continues Asser, "that she was addressing the king, Alfred."

This anecdote was often told in an after day, and no doubt awakened many a smile around the cheerful Saxon hearths, among both noble and lowly, when the brave monarch had

either driven the ravagers from his dominion, or compelled the remnant to settle down peaceably in such places as he in his wisdom had allotted to them. And now, even through the dim distance of nearly a thousand years, we can call up the image of the Saxon king, with his grave, intelligent countenance, as he sat in the humble hut, preparing his weapons of the chase, his thoughts wandering far away to those he loved, or brooding thoughtfully over the causes which had forced him from his high estate. We can fancy the angry spot gathering for a moment upon his kingly brow, as, startled by the shrill clamour of the cowherd's wife, he half turned his head, and the faint, good-natured smile that followed, while the glowing embers threw a sunshine over his face, as he afterwards stooped down and turned the loaves which the rough-tempered, but warm-hearted Saxon woman had prepared for their homely meal; and this anecdote is all the more endeared to us by the fact that the noble-minded king, on a later day, recommended the cowherd Denulf to the study of letters, and afterwards promoted him to a high situation in the church. While residing in the neighbourhood of this cowherd's hovel, says an old manuscript, written a century or two after these events, and attributed to an abbot of Croyland, "Alfred was one day casually recognised by some of his people, who, being dispersed, and flying all around, stopped where he was. An eager desire then arose both in the king and his knights to devise a remedy for their fugitive condition. In a few days they constructed a place of defence as well as they could; and here, recovering a little of his strength, and comforted by the protection of a few friends, he began to move in warfare against his enemies. His companions were very few in number compared with the barbarian multitude, nor could they on the first day, or by their first attacks, obtain any advantages; yet they neither quitted the foe nor submitted to their defeats; but, supported by the hope of victory, as their small number gradually increased, they renewed their efforts, and made one battle but the preparation for another. Sometimes conquerors and sometimes conquered, they learned to overcome time by chance, and chance by time. The king, both when he failed, and when he was successful, preserved a cheerful countenance, and supported his friends by his example."

What a rich, unwritten volume, does this last extract contain;

what a diary of valorous deeds, keen privations, and patient sufferings! What "footmarks on the sands of time" are here left! These are the great gaps in history which we mourn over—the changes which Time has made, as he passed through the human ranks he has hewn down, and which we regret he has not chronicled. We would forgive the grim scythe-bearer the ten thousand battles he has buried in oblivion, had he but preserved for us one day of the life of Alfred on this lonely island—one brief record of what he said and did between sunrise and sunset, whilst he sojourned with Denulf, the cowherd. Alas! alas! Time has but shaken off the blood that dappled his pinions, upon the pages of History; the sweet dew-drops which hung like silver upon his plumes, and fed the flowers, have evaporated in the sunsets that saw them wither.

Although a gloom seemed to have settled down upon the land during the absence of Alfred, yet all was not so hopeless as it appeared; for Hubba, who with his own hand had shed the blood of so many monks at the massacre of Peterborough, had himself been slain by Odun, the earl of Devonshire; and the magical banner which the three sisters of Hubba are said to have woven in one noontide, during which they ceased not to chaunt their mystic rhymes, had fallen into the hands of the Saxons. The rumour of such a victory cheered the heart of Alfred, and he must have felt humbled at the thought that, while he himself was inactive, there still existed English hearts that preferred pouring forth their best blood to becoming slaves to their invaders.

To render his island retreat more secure, Alfred caused a defensive tower to be erected on each side of the bridge; and, as this was the only point of access by land, he there placed, as sentinels, a few of his most trusty followers, so that they might be ready to give the alarm in the event of their hiding-place being discovered. Scarcely a day passed, but he sallied forth at the head of his little band and assailed the enemy. Too weak to attack the main body, he hung upon, and harassed their foragers; he waylaid the Danish plunderers as they passed on their way to their camp with the spoil, and again wrested from them what they had wrung from his own countrymen. Day and night, Alfred and his followers were ever springing unawares upon the invaders from out the wood, the marsh, and the morass; wherever a clump of trees grew, or a screen of willows

gave them shelter, there did the Saxons conceal themselves until the enemy appeared, when, rushing forth, they laid the spoilers low. Such a system of warfare made the king well acquainted with all the secret passes in the neighbourhood, and thus enabled him with his little band to thread his way securely between the bog and the morass, and to attack the Northmen at such unexpected points as they never dreamed it was possible for the enemy to pass. Such a rugged method of attack also inured them to hardships, kindled the martial spirit which had too long slumbered, and thus schooled Alfred in that generalship which he so skilfully brought to bear upon a larger scale when he overthrew the Danes. Even before his rank was discovered, his fame had spread for miles around the country; and all who had spirit enough to throw off the Danish yoke, who preferred a life of freedom in the woods and wilds, and had sufficient courage to abandon their homes for the love of liberty, gathered around and fought under the banner of the island stranger. Such of the Saxons as had stooped to acknowledge the Danish rulers, did not escape scathless from the attacks of Alfred and his followers; for he made them feel how feeble was the power upon which their cowardly fears had thrown themselves for protection, when measured beside the strength of their own patriotic countrymen.

Of the straits to which he was sometimes driven, Time has preserved one touching record, which beautifully illustrates the benevolence of his character. One day, while his attendants were out hunting, or searching for provisions, and the king sat alone in the humble abode which had been hastily reared for his accommodation, whiling away the heavy hours by the perusal of a book, a poor man came up to him, weary and hungry, and asked his alms in God's name. Alfred took up the only loaf which remained, and, breaking it asunder, said, "It is one poor man visiting another;" then, thanking God that it was in his power to relieve the beggar, he shared his last loaf with him; for he well remembered his own privations when he first applied for shelter at the cowherd's hut.

Turn we now to a brighter page in the life of this great king, when, emerging from his hiding-place, he seemed to spring up suddenly into a new existence, and by his brave and valorous deeds to startle alike both friend and foe.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALFRED THE GREAT.

“’Tis much he dare :

And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his brain
To act in safety.”—SHAKSPERE.

NEAR Westbury, in Wiltshire, may still be seen a hill, which, as it overlooks the neighbouring plain, appears rugged, lofty, abrupt, and difficult of ascent; its summit is marked with the trenches and ditches which the Danes threw up when they were encamped upon and around it during the reign of Alfred. This spot the Saxon king resolved to visit in disguise before he risked the battle on which the fate of his kingdom depended. To accomplish this, he assumed the character of a harper, or gleeman, and approaching the enemy’s outposts, he attracted the attention of the sentries by his singing and music; after playing for some time among the tents of the common soldiers, the minstrel was at last led by one of the Danish chiefs to the camp of Godrun, the sea king. What were the thoughts of Alfred while he looked full in the face of his enemy as he stood before him in his tent? what was the air he played—the words he sang?—though Fancy stands ready, with her lips apart, to pour both into our ear, Truth, with a grave look, bids us pass on, and from her silence we know they are lost for ever. That Alfred narrowly reconnoitred their position, is best proved by the plan he adopted after the victory, when he drew a belt around the whole intrenchment. After he was dismissed from the Danish encampments with praise and presents (the latter the plunder of his own subjects), he hastened to his island retreat at Athelney, and began to make preparations for attacking the enemy. The naked sword and arrow were borne by faithful emissaries throughout the whole length and breadth of the counties of Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorsetshire, and Somersetshire; and in addition to the ancient and imperative summons brought by these war messengers, they were intrusted with the secret of Alfred’s hiding-place, and all were commanded to meet him with the strongest military force they could muster, within



Alfred describing the Danish Camp on his return

three days from the time they first received a message. The east side of Selwood Forest, or, as the Saxon name signifies, The Wood of Willows, was the mustering ground. The spot itself was marked by Egbert's stone, said to have been the remains of a druidical monument, and celebrated on account of a victory which Egbert once won there. This Wood of Willows, in the time of Alfred, extended about fifteen miles in length, and six in breadth, stretching over the country which now lies from beyond Frome to Burham.

The news of Alfred's being alive, when no tidings had been heard of him for nearly six months, spread hope and delight throughout all the adjoining counties; and for three days the west Saxons rushed in joyfully to the appointed place of meeting; and never before had the silent shades of Selwood forest been startled by such a braying of trumpets and clamour of voices as were ever and anon raised to welcome each new comer—never had Alfred before received such warm-hearted homage as he did during those three days from his subjects, nor had king ever before so boldly perilled himself as to enter alone into the enemy's encampment. A grand sight must it have been to have witnessed the Saxon banner, with the white horse displayed upon its folds, floating above that grey old druidical monument—to have seen that assembly of brave warriors in the morning sunshine encamped beside the great willow wood, which was then waving in all the green luxuriance that adorns the willow-tree at the latter end of May. It was a sight which, once to have seen, would have made an old man die happy. How we long to know how Alfred looked, and what he wore, the colour of the horse he rode upon, and what he said to each new-comer, and whether, during his absence, he looked thinner, or older, or more care-worn. Yet all this was seen and heard by thousands, although not a record remains to bring him again before our "mind's eye."

When all was ready, Alfred marched his newly-raised forces into the enemy's neighbourhood; and though not clearly made out, it would almost appear as if he encamped for the night on a hill, which fronted the intrenchments of the Danes. Next morning, both armies drew up on the plains of Ethandune. Behind the forces commanded by Godrun rose Bratton Hill, with its strong encampment, and on this the Danes could fall back if they were defeated; behind Alfred, there lay, miles

away, the little island of Athelney, the bridge, the towers, and the cowherd's hut; there was nothing, if he looked back, to tempt him to retreat, only the broad marshes and the wild willow wood for him again to fall upon. The sea-king little thought, as he looked on, a shade paler than when he sat listening to the Saxon gleeman in his tent, that the same minstrel commanded the mighty force which was then arrayed before him. By his richest armlet of gold, and the shoulder-blade of his choicest war-horse, he would have sworn, that had he known of the quality of his harper, he would that night have sent him to have played in the banquet-hall of Odin.

The Saxons commenced the attack; for the Danish leader, as if something foreboded a defeat, seemed with his army to hug the foot of his encampment;—eager, hot, and impetuous, Alfred's soldiers rushed upon the enemy in that reckless order which often ends in defeat, unless it is the impulsive outbreak of determined valour. The Danish ranks were broken for a few moments, then rallied again in the hand-to-hand fight as they met the foremost Saxons, who had been thrown in amongst them. In this mingled *mêlée* of uplifted swords, battle-axes, and javelins, and while the Danes were slowly regaining the ground they had lost, a shower of arrows was suddenly poured in amongst them, which came full and blinding into their faces, and this was followed by the instant charge of the Saxon spearmen; and to add to the panic which had fallen upon the Danes, a cry was raised amongst the superstitious soldiers under Alfred, that one of the Saxon saints had suddenly appeared amongst them, had seized the banner, and borne it into the very thickest of the enemy's ranks. From that moment, the Danes began to retreat; there was no withstanding an army which fought under the belief that they were led on by a supernatural leader. Alfred himself had risen up so unexpectedly amongst them, that their enthusiasm, which had taken the place of despair, was raised to the highest pitch, they were ready to believe that St. Neot, or any other saint in the Saxon calendar, had taken their king under his special protection, and they cheerfully followed the mysterious standard-bearer into the very heart of the Danish ranks. They scattered the enemy before them like thistle-down before the autumnal blast; wherever the sea-kings rallied for a moment, and made head against the islanders, the Saxon storm tore over them, and they vanished like the foam which

the wind tears from the billow, and bears howling along as it rushes over the waves, which roll away affrighted before its wrath. The field was strewn with the dead; never before had the Danes met with so sudden and decisive a defeat.

Godrun retreated with the shattered remnant of his army into the intrenchments. Alfred surrounded him in his stronghold; every day which saw the Danish garrison grow weaker for want of provisions and water, saw the army of Alfred strengthened by the arrival of new forces. The Saxon king had not left his enemies a single passage by which they could escape, without first fighting their way through the besieging army. On the fourteenth day, Godrun capitulated, and humbly sued for peace. Generous as he was brave, Alfred readily acceded to his request, on such mild terms as must have made the invaders ashamed of the cruelties they had formerly inflicted upon their conquerors. Alfred well knew the little value that the Danes placed either upon their oaths or their hostages; the former they had ever broken the moment they escaped; and as to the latter, they left them either to perish or be liberated, just as chance directed. They cared not to come back and redeem their pledges when there was plunder before them. Alfred knew that England was ample enough for them both; and he proposed that if they would abandon their pagan creed, and settle down peaceably, to cultivate the soil, instead of the arts of war, they should for the future be friends, and he would give them East Anglia for an inheritance. Godrun thankfully accepted the noble offer, and was baptized. Alfred became answerable for the "promises and vows" made by the Danish king at the font. The boundaries of the two nations were sworn to in a solemn treaty, and Godrun was installed in his new territory, which he parcelled out amongst his followers. The immense space of ground which Alfred allotted to the Danish king and his soldiers consisted of that which is now occupied by the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Essex, together with portions of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and even a part of Huntingdonshire. But Alfred did not rest content with merely presenting them with such vast territory; he also protected them with the same equal laws; he made no distinction in the punishment of a crime, whether it was committed by a Dane or a Saxon—each was to be alike tried by a jury of twelve men. He made Ethelred, who afterwards married his daughter Ethelfleda, com-

mander over the kingdom of Mercia, strengthened his army, and thus planted a strong barrier between that kingdom and the Danish settlements of Deiri and Bernicia. Cities, and castles, and fortifications which had fallen into neglect and ruin, he repaired and rebuilt; he separated the country into hundreds and tythings, and established a militia, which were to serve for a given number of weeks, then return home again, and their places to be supplied by others, each changing about in succession. Hitherto, the Saxons had but little to defend; but now the country was so well protected, that the soldier came and went with a cheerful heart, for he no longer found a pile of blackened ashes to mark the spot where his home had once stood. Instead of shuddering lest he should see the mangled remains of his wife and children, or the Danish fires reddening the sky, he now approached the calm comforts of his humble English home, and slept securely in the assurance that the eagle eye of Alfred was ever sweeping over sea and land, and that ten thousand Saxon swords were always ready to be uplifted at his bidding. Saxon carols were chaunted in the harvest-fields at the close of the summer of 878; and merry voices were heard, where only the year before there sounded "the wailing tones of sad lament," for a mighty mind was now engrossed with the welfare of the people.

About this time, a large fleet of Danes, under the command of the famous sea-king Hastings, arrived in the Thames, and, crossing the country, sought the alliance of Godrun, who with his soldiers was following the peaceful occupations of husbandry, and the more useful arts of civilized life, when their Northern brethren landed. Hastings, finding that he could not win Godrun from his allegiance to Alfred, after wintering at Fulham, crossed over into Flanders, where he remained for some time at Ghent. Meantime, Alfred continued to increase his navy, to build ships of a larger size, and of such forms as were better adapted to ride out the storm, and to grapple with the enemy on their own element. The Saxon and Danish ships were constantly coming in contact on the ocean, and now victory generally declared itself in favour of the former. In 884, another Danish fleet invaded England and besieged Rochester, but the citizens valiantly defended the place until Alfred with his army arrived to relieve them. No sooner did the Saxon king appear, than the Danes abandoned their fortress, leaving behind the

horses and captives they had brought over from France; and, hurrying off with their ships, they again set sail for the coast of Gaul. No sooner were they driven out of England, than Alfred had to hasten into East Anglia, where a strong force of Northmen had arrived, and who seemed determined to force the followers of Godrun into rebellion. Many of the Danish settlers preferred their old piratical habits to the more peaceful mode of life which Alfred had compelled them to adopt, and readily took down the battle-axe from the smoke-discoloured beam where it had so peacefully rested,* and withdrew the club, bristling with iron spikes, the star of the morning, from its hiding-place, to join the new comers. The first Danish ships the Saxons attacked, they either captured or sunk, and the Northmen are said to have fought so fiercely, that every soul on board perished. Another fleet arrived, and gained some slight advantage over the Saxons; but in the end Alfred conquered, and compelled the Danes who occupied East Anglia again to settle down to their peaceful occupations.

The most celebrated sea-king that tried his strength with Alfred, was Hastings, or Haestan—who again made his appearance—for the weight of his arm had hitherto fallen upon France and Flanders, and the opposite coast. For years this famous Vikinger had lived upon the ocean; the poets of the period extol him as a monarch whose territories were unbounded, whose kingdom no eye could ever take in at a glance; for his home was upon the sea, his throne where the tempest rose, and his sceptre swayed over realms into which the shark, the sea-horse, the monsters of the deep, and the birds of the ocean dare only venture. He called his ships together by the sound of an ivory horn, which was ever suspended around his neck, and the shrill tones of which might be heard for miles inland, and over the sea—the Saxons called it the Danish thunder. Whenever that blast broke out, the herdsman hurried his cattle into the darkest recesses of the forest—thethane barricaded the doors of his habitation, and the earl drew up his drawbridge, locked up his armour and his attendants, and never ventured to parley with either the sea-king or his followers, unless the deep moat was between them. For a quarter of a century had he harassed the neighbouring nations, living upon the plunder he obtained, until,

* Thierry's Norman Conquest.

weary of leading such an unsettled life, he resolved to become a king either over the Danes or the Saxons, and, now that Godrun was dead, he doubted not but that, if he could conquer Alfred, his own countrymen would gladly accept him for their monarch.

The mighty mind of Alfred was busy meditating upon the welfare of his people, and devising plans for their future improvement, when his study was interrupted by the arrival of this new horde of Northmen, and he was compelled to throw aside his books and take up the sword. Skilled alike in a knowledge of both arts and arms, he readily transformed himself from the statesman to the soldier, and moved, with but little preparation, from the closet to the camp. A heart less brave than Alfred's would have quailed at beholding two hundred and fifty Danish vessels darkening the Kentish coast, especially when the forces they contained landed safely near the large forest of Andreade, that far-stretching land of gloomy trees, which had proved so fatal to the Britons, when Ella led on his Saxon hosts to battle with the ancient islanders. But Alfred looked on, and remembered the battle of Ethandune, and his large eye-lids quivered not, neither did a motion of fear cloud his firmly-chiselled countenance; for he knew that he reigned in the hearts of his subjects. He saw the fortress carried which had been erected in the marshes of Romney; beheld his enemies ravaging the country along the coast, and as far inland as Berkshire; saw Hastings enter the mouth of the Thames, with eighty ships, and strongly fortify himself near Milton, and then he began to act. Wheeling up his army midway, the Saxon king struck in between the two divisions of the Danish forces; on his right he left them the gloomy forest of Andreade, and the straits of Dover to fall back upon; on his left the deep mouth of the Thames, which opens upon the coast of Essex, yet even there planting a strong force between the shore and their ships.

Wherever the Danes moved, to the right or to the left, landward or seaward, the forces of Alfred were upon them. If they endeavoured to cross over into Essex, they were driven back upon their intrenchments; if they sought to rejoin their brethren beside the sea-coast, the West Saxons drove them back. The sea-shores and the skirts of the forest were guarded with jealous eyes. Wherever a Danish helmet appeared, there was a Saxon sword already uplifted. Hastings was awe-struck; he was a

prisoner in his own stronghold; he lay like a giant, manacled with the very fetters his own strength had forged. If he but stirred a foot, Saxon blows fell thick and heavily upon it, and jarred again upon the other limb, which stood useless, and so far apart. Alfred left the Danes who inhabited East Anglia to break loose and ravage at their will, they could but prey upon each other. He kept them aloof from the quarry he was hunting down.

Shut up within his camp, and not able to send out a single forager with safety, Hastings had at last recourse to stratagem, and sent messengers to Alfred, offering to leave the kingdom if he would guarantee him a free passage to his ships. To this proposition Alfred consented; but no sooner had Hastings embarked, as if to fulfil his engagement, than the other division of the army rushed across the country, in the rear of Alfred's forces, and crossing the Thames where it was fordable, landed in Essex, where they met the division assembled under Hastings at Benfleet. Only a portion, however, passed; for, turning his back upon the North Foreland, Alfred pursued the remainder into Surrey, and overtook them at Farnham, where he obtained a complete victory; for Alfred had so manœuvred his forces as to place the remnant of the Danish army between himself and the Thames, and that too at a spot where it was no longer fordable. Thus, those who escaped the Saxon swords plunged into the river, and were drowned. Those who could swim, and a small portion who were fortunate enough to pass the current on horseback, escaped through Middlesex into Essex, where Alfred pursued them across the Coln, and finally blockaded them in the isle of Mersey. Alfred continued the siege long enough to compel the Northmen to sue for peace, which he granted them, on condition that they at once quitted England.

But scarcely had Alfred succeeded in defeating the enemy in one quarter before a new force sprung up, ready armed, and began to make head against him. The Danes of Northumbria and East Anglia, who had for a number of years exchanged their swords and spears for the sickle and the pruning-hook, were no longer able to withstand the temptations which war and plunder offered; but uniting their forces together, resolved to attack Wessex. The Essex fleet, which, combined with that of Hastings, consisted of about a hundred sail, passed without interruption round the North Foreland, and along the southern

coast, as far as Devonshire, where they laid siege to Exeter. The other division, consisting of forty vessels that had been fitted out in Northumbria, sailed round the north of Scotland, and along the western coast, until they reached the Bristol channel, where they laid siege to a fortified town on the north of the Severn. No sooner did the tidings of this new invasion reach the ears of Alfred, than he hastened off to the relief of Exeter, where he again conquered the Danes, drove them back to their ships, then, crossing over to the Severn, he compelled the Northumbrian fleet to hasten out of the Bristol channel, and once more left the west of England in a state of security.

The movements of Hastings at this period are not very clearly laid down. He appears to have crossed the Thames again, and once more to have established himself in Essex, at South Benfleet. But whether it was here that the camp of the Danish king was broken up and plundered, and his wife and children taken prisoners, or whether it was when he abandoned his encampment in Kent that these disasters befel him, it is difficult to understand, so rapid were the movements of both the Danes and the Saxons at this period. Alfred, however, baptized both the sons of Hastings, and loading them with presents, sent them back again, together with their mother, in safety to the camp of the Danish king. But delicacy and kindness were alike wasted upon this Danish chief. Having neither home nor country which he could call his own, and a vast family of rapacious robbers to provide for, he had no alternative but either to plunder or starve. He probably would have quitted England, but he knew not where to go; and his Danish brethren, fearful that he should settle down with his numerous followers, and take possession of the land which they had for several years so peacefully cultivated, chose what appeared to them the least evil, and assisted him to win new territories from the Saxons.

Leaving a portion of his followers to protect the intrenchment in Wessex, Hastings marched at the head of a powerful force into Mercia: for he found it difficult to secure supplies in a neighbourhood which was so narrowly watched by Alfred. Scarcely was his back turned, before the Saxons attacked the stronghold he had quitted, and again carried off his wealth, his family, and his ships. This was the second time the wife and children of Hastings had fallen into the hands of Alfred. His



Alfred releasing the family of Hastings.

chiefs intreated of him to put them to death, for Hastings had again violated the oath which he had taken to quit the kingdom, but the noble nature of Alfred recoiled from so cruel and cold-blooded an act, and loading them a second time with presents, he sent his own followers to conduct them in safety to the camp of the Danish king. Another division of the Danes had again attacked Exeter; Alfred hastened with his cavalry across the country as before, and compelled them to retreat to their ships. The fleet put out to sea, then doubled again towards the land, and attacked Chichester; but here they were defeated by the citizens and the neighbouring peasantry, and hundreds were slain.

When Alfred returned from Exeter, he found Hastings once more intrenched in Essex, with his forces greatly strengthened by the Northumbrian and East Anglian Danes, who had joined him in Mercia. A less active king than Alfred would never have kept pace with the rapid motions of the Danish monarch. Hastings now boldly sailed up the Thames. He then marched across to the Severn, where he was followed by the governor of Mercia, and attacked by the united forces of the Saxons and the men of South Wales. Alfred again advanced to join them, and the invaders were hemmed round by the Saxon army in the strong fortress of Buttington on the Severn. Here Hastings and his followers were compelled to endure all the horrors of a sharp siege, for to such straits were the Danes driven, that they were under the necessity of killing their horses for food. Blockaded alike on the land and on the river, and reduced to such a state of famine that numbers perished, the Northmen resolved at last to sally out upon the Saxons, and either to force a passage through the besieging army, or perish in the attempt. They rushed out headlong from their intrenchments, with a determined valour, worthy of a better cause. Thousands were either slain or drowned; and the remnant, with Hastings at their head, again escaped into Essex. The loss on the part of the Saxons was also severe; since, exhausted as the Danes must have been by siege and famine, it would not have been difficult to have cut off their retreat, had not the battle been so desperate; for Alfred had to fight with an enemy who was compelled either to conquer or perish; who had been defeated and driven from nearly every kingdom on the continent, and who seemed to pine for a home in a fertile

country, where so many of his brethren had taken up their abode. The very bread he ate depended upon the chances of plunder; he would have been contented to settle down peaceably, as Godrun had beforetime done, but when Alfred saw the East Anglian and Northumbrian Danes rendering their aid to every new-comer, and eager, as of old, to oppose him, he found that a further extension of such lenient policy would soon wrest the remainder of the island entirely from his hands, and he resolved they should yet feel that a Saxon arm grasped the sceptre of England. None of the sea-kings had kept their faith like Godrun; he, alone, regarded the oaths which he swore on the golden bracelets that were sacred to his gods, and remained true to his allegiance.

The army of Hastings was soon recruited again from the former resources, and early in the spring he once more set out into the midland counties, plundering along his march until he reached Chester, where he again threw up a strong intrenchment. Alfred, at the head of his army, was soon in pursuit of the dangerous sea-king, and when he found how strongly he had fortified himself at Chester, the Saxon monarch had recourse to his old plan of starving out the garrison; and to effect this purpose he gathered up all the cattle in the neighbourhood, and all the corn in the district for miles around. Hastings and his followers had too bitter a remembrance of the famine they had endured at Buttington, to run another risk of suffering such privation, while there yet remained a chance of escape; so they once more forced their way through the Saxon army, rushed into North Wales, carried off from thence what booty they could, and retreated into East Anglia through such counties as were inhabited by the Danes, carefully avoiding every spot which Alfred and his army occupied. The county of Essex seems always to have been the favourite rallying point of Hastings, and here he appears to have settled down amongst his countrymen in the autumn of 896; to protect his ships during the winter, he built a fortress on the river Lea, which divides Middlesex from Essex, and there drew up his fleet within a distance of twenty miles from London. In this neighbourhood he appears to have reposed in safety until the following summer, when London poured forth its troops to attack the Danish fortress; but so strongly had Hastings intrenched himself, that

all the military array of Middlesex was unable to penetrate the encampment of the sea-king.

At the close of summer, Alfred considered it necessary to be in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, to protect his subjects from the attacks of the Danes while they gathered in their harvest. Driving in foragers, attacking outposts, and checking attempted sallies, had rendered Alfred as familiar with the construction of the invaders' fortresses as they were themselves, and one day while meditating how he could most advantageously strike a decisive blow, and compel the enemy to abandon their stronghold, he hit upon the daring plan of draining the river Lea, and leaving the whole of the Danish fleet aground. To accomplish this, he ordered his soldiers to dig three new channels below the level of the river, and to raise two fortresses on either side the Lea to protect their operations. He drew off the waters into a tributary stream which emptied itself into the Thames, so that, as an old writer says, "where a ship might sail in time afore past, then a little boat might scarcely row." In the night, Hastings again broke through the toils with which the inventive genius of Alfred had encompassed him; and abandoning his ships, which were now useless, he contrived to send off the wives and children of his followers into East Anglia, to the care of his countrymen; he thus escaped from Alfred, and reached Bridgenorth, near the Severn, where he again intrenched himself. Although, as usual, he was quickly followed by the Saxon king, yet so strong was the military position which the Danes occupied, that with the exception of a slight skirmish or two, they were allowed to pass the winter unmolested. Many of the Danish vessels which Hastings had left behind were again set afloat, and conducted with great triumph into the Thames. The remainder were burnt and destroyed.

Harassed and defeated on every hand, the spirit of Hastings at last bowed down before the superior genius of Alfred; and as dissensions already began to break out in the Danish camp, the brave but unfortunate sea-king fitted up his shattered fleet as he best could, and in the spring of 897 departed for France, where some small portion of territory was allotted to him by the king, and there he passed the remainder of his days. A few naval engagements of but little note took place after the departure of Hast-

ings, in all of which the Saxons were victorious; and towards the close of his reign Alfred treated these sea-pirates with great severity, and on one occasion ordered several of them to be executed. These, however, appear to have belonged to either Northumbria or East Anglia,—and all such had sworn allegiance to Alfred. Before the close of his reign, the Saxon fleet consisted of above a hundred strongly-built and well-rigged vessels, many of these were manned by Frieslanders, and as they were placed in such situations as the Danes had generally selected for their landing-places, they silently overawed and checked the inroads of the enemy, as they went prowling about “like guardian giants along the coast.” This great king did not survive the departure of Hastings above three years. He died on the 26th of October, in the year 900, or 901. Hitherto we have been compelled to confine ourselves to the military achievements of this celebrated monarch. A summary of his great intellectual attainments, which a volume would scarcely suffice to contain, we shall attempt to crowd within the brief space of another chapter

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHARACTER OF ALFRED THE GREAT.

“Hear him but reason on divinity,
 And, all-admiring, with an inward wish.
 You would desire the king were made a prelate;
 Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
 You would say—it hath been all-in-all his study:
 List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
 A fearful battle rendered you in music.”

SHAKSPERE.

WE have seen the shadow of this great king pass, through the clouds of sorrow and suffering, into the glory and immortality which still shed their lustre around his memory, after the darkness of nearly a thousand winters has gathered and passed over his grave. Even the gloomy gates of death could not extinguish, in the volumed blackness they enclose, the trailing splendour which accompanied his setting, without leaving behind a summer twilight, over a land where before there was nothing but darkness to mark the departing day. Upon a sky dim, and unsprinkled with the golden letters of light, Alfred first rose, the evening star of English history. From his first appearance a brightness marked his course; even in the morning of life, he “flamed upon the forehead of the sky.” Instead of the dull, cold, leaden grey, which announced the appearance of other kings, his crowned head broke the stormy rack, in a true splendour that befitted such majesty, and though dimmed for awhile, every observant eye could see that it was the sun which hung behind the clouds.

In childhood, long before his step-mother, Judith, had taught him to read, his chief delight was in committing to memory the poems which the Saxon bards chaunted in his father’s court; and who can doubt but that many a wandering minstrel descended from the ancient Cymry, struck his harp within the Saxon halls, and made the boyish heart of Alfred thrill again, as he heard the praises of those early British heroes sung, whose bare breasts and sharp swords were the bold bulwarks that so long withstood the mailed legions which the haughty emperor of Rome had sent, swarming over our own island shores. In this

rude school was Alfred first taught that the names of the good, the great, and the brave can never die; that valour and virtue were immortal; and he resolved to emulate the deeds of those whose memories time can never obliterate; by whose names we number the footsteps of eternity, when marble and monumental brass have crumbled into dust. It was at the Castaly of the Muses, which then but trickled from a rude, grey Saxon font, where Alfred first drank in the draught that gave him immortality. Eager for knowledge, he looked around in vain for any one to instruct him; he had not a clergyman about him who could translate the prayers he read in Latin, into Saxon; until poor old Asser came from Wales, he could not find in his whole court a scholar equal to himself. His nobles could hunt and fight; his brothers could do no more: they lived and died, and their names would never have been remembered had they not chanced to have been kings. The mind of Alfred was fashioned in another mould; accident had made him a king, and he resolved to become a man, to think and act worthy of a being who bore on his brow God's image—to be something more than the mere heir to a hollow crown and the lands of Wessex; so he threw aside his sword, which he knew a thousand arms could wield as well as his own, and took up his pen. He was the first Saxon king who attempted to conquer his enemies without killing them—who offered them bread instead of the sword. He was much wiser than many legislators in our own enlightened times. He gave Godwin and his Danes land and seed, bade them work, and live honestly and peacefully; they had felt the weight of his arm before-time, and, for a long period after, they disturbed not his study again. What benefit was it to Alfred to whiten with human bones a land which he knew it would be better to cultivate?—there was room enough for them all, so he sat down again to enrich his own mind. We can readily imagine that he never took up his sword without a feeling of reluctance—that he thought a man could not be worse employed than in slaying his fellow men. Alfred was England's earliest reformer. When his nobles found that he had determined to find them no more fighting, they took to reading and writing, for time hung heavily upon their hands. He then allowed them to share in his councils, and they began to make laws for the living, instead of slaying, and then fixing a price to be paid to the kindred of the dead for the murder they had committed.

A lingering and painful disease, which had for years baffled the skill of all his physicians—the constant inroads of the northmen, who were ever keeping the country in a state of alarm—a dearth of kindred spirits to cheer him in his intellectual labours—prevented not the persevering king from struggling onward, in his toilsome journey, in search of knowledge and truth. Bede, with the exception of a single poem, had composed all his works in Latin; and, with scarcely an exception, there was no production of any merit that Alfred could obtain, at that period, but what was written in the same language; and when he looked round amongst all the thousands he ruled over, not one could be found, until Asser appeared, who was capable of instructing him, or who could translate into the Saxon tongue the knowledge for which he thirsted. He sent in quest of literary men to Rome, to France, to Ireland; wherever they could be found, he despatched messengers with presents to intreat and tempt them to visit his court. When they arrived, he made them equals and friends—he promoted them to the highest offices in his government—he valued them higher than all his treasures of gold and silver—by day and night they were his inseparable companions. He listened to the passages they translated, stopped them from time to time, and made notes of the most striking thoughts, and, in an after-day, in numerous instances, he extended the crude ideas of the ancient writers, and threw in a thousand beautiful illustrations of his own, and such as were never dreamed of by the original authors; they reflect his own thoughts and feelings; and while we peruse them we know that we are drinking in the wisdom of Alfred. In his translation of Orosius he made a great portion of the geography and history of the world, as it was then understood, familiar to his countrymen; by his translation of Bede he gave them an insight into the records of their own land, and showed his nobles how indifferently their predecessors had conducted the government. By his Boethius he instilled into their minds many moral axioms, imparted to them his own thoughts and feelings, and slowly raised them to that high intellectual station to which he had, by his own exertions, attained; for though he still ever soared high above them, yet there were eminences up which they never could have climbed unless by his aid. He found his nobles but little better than the northern barbarians, and he left them wise and thinking men. He made

a green and flowery place of what had been before but a wide and weedy wilderness. He divided his attendants into three bodies, and when one party had served him a month, they returned home, and were succeeded by another; for it was not in the nature of Alfred to compel any of his attendants to neglect their own private affairs while serving him. By this means he but claimed their services during four months in the year, the remainder of the time they were allowed to dedicate to their own domestic matters. He divided his income into separate portions, appropriating each part to a particular purpose—first, he allotted a portion to his warriors and attendants; the next allotment was expended in building, in the improvement of which he collected many eminent architects from different nations; the third he expended in the relief of foreigners; no matter from what country they came, they left not the court of Alfred empty-handed: the remainder of his revenue was dedicated to religious purposes, to the support of the monasteries he had built, the schools he had erected, and of the various churches throughout the whole of the dominions. Out of this division the larger portion was religiously dedicated to the relief of the poor. Not only his treasures, but his time, was also equally divided; he but allowed one-third for rest and retirement, and within it scrupulously included the whole that he thought necessary to be consumed in partaking of his meals. The second eight hours he devoted wholly to the affairs of his kingdom, to the meeting of his council, to the assembling of his witena-gemot, audiences, plans of protection for the repelling of invasions, and for the better working of the great machinery which he had set in motion to better the condition of his subjects and weaken the power of his enemies. The remaining third of his time he appropriated to study and his religious duties. It was in this division, doubtless the happiest of all, that Asser and Grimbold read and translated while he listened, and in the little note-book which Asser had made him, he put down such thoughts as made the greatest impression on his mind. Alfred had neither clock nor chronometer with which to measure out the hours, only the sun and moving shadow by which he could mete out time, and they could neither guide him on the dull, cloudy day, nor the dark night. To overcome this difficulty, and mark the divisions of the twenty-four hours, he had wax candles made, twelve inches in length, each of which was marked at equal distances

and although the time taken up in replacing and re-lighting them would scarcely serve to mark accurately the lapse of minutes, yet they were so equally made, that six of them, with but little variation, used in succession, lasted out the twenty-four hours. To guard against the casualties of winds and draughts, he inclosed his candles in thin, white, transparent horn, and this result led to the invention of lanterns; and thus he measured time, which to him was the most valuable of all earthly treasures, for he considered his life as a trust held for the benefit of his people; and the knowledge which he himself accumulated he felt it a sacred duty to impart to others. From what was then considered the remotest corners of the earth, he despatched emissaries to gather information; he sent an embassy to India, and had messengers continually passing to and from Rome. The Danes, whom he had permitted to settle down peaceably in his dominions, he placed upon the same footing as the Saxons, giving to them equal laws, and punishing the criminals of both nations with the same impartial rigour, which many historians have considered to be somewhat too severe. Justice was then but little understood; and when the judges came to such decisions as Alfred considered unfair to the party injured, he occupied the tribunal, and had the matter brought before him, and according to his own judgment decided the case. He caused one of his own judges, named Cadwine, to be hanged, for having condemned a man to death without the consent of the whole jury. Freberne he also ordered to be executed, for sentencing one Harpin to suffer death, when the jury were undecided in their verdict; for when there was a doubt, Alfred concluded it was but just to save the accused. He would neither permit the jury to return an unjust verdict, nor the judge to influence their decision; but where there was doubt and difficulty to contend against, he brought the whole weight of his own clear, unbiassed intellect to bear upon the subject.

Without breaking down the warlike spirit of the people, he by a salutary law checked the thirst of personal revenge, permitting no man to slay his enemy in secret, not even if he knew that that enemy was seated at home beside his own hearth, he was not allowed to fight with him until he had publicly demanded redress. If the body of a murdered man was found, the penalty, which, considering the value of money in those times, was heavy, fell upon the whole hundred or tything in

which the dead body was discovered. By this means, the innocent had the powerful motive of self-interest to induce them to give up the murderer. Rude and primitive as such a system may at first appear, these laws were well adapted to the spirit of the barbarous age in which he lived, when a pagan Dane considered it a meritorious work to slay a Saxon Christian, and the latter thought that he was doing Heaven service when he sent the spoiler of its monasteries, and the slayer of its priests, to revel in the halls of the blood-stained gods he worshipped. Elders were appointed over each hundred, and were answerable for the conduct of all who belonged to them. If a crime was committed, the roll was called over, and suspicion naturally fell upon the missing man who had fled. No other hundred could register his name until he had dwelt a given time amongst them; and through this strict system of espionage, pardonable only in such turbulent times, the land, as it were, was engirded with a continuous chain, not a link of which could be broken without the gap becoming visible. Alfred not only introduced the decalogue into his laws, but so adapted the Mosaic code to the habits of the age in which he lived, as to render it as effective amongst the Anglo-Saxons as it had been with the Israelites of old. His *witena-gemot*, or assembly of nobles, or parliament, or by whatever name we choose to designate the council of the land, was called upon to give its consent to these enactments, before they were put into operation, and such clauses as it objected to, Alfred blotted out from his *Dom-boc*. He first drew the bold outline of our present mode of government; and limned with his hand, though rudely, the grand form of our glorious constitution. He was proverbially known amongst his subjects by the title of the "Truth-teller;" and it was a saying during his reign, that golden bracelets might be hung upon the landmarks beside the common highways without a fear of their removal, such a vigorous watch did the law keep.

In the character of Alfred was embodied all the elements which the poet, the dramatist, and the novelist attempt to throw around their most perfect ideas of a hero. He was a warrior, a statesman, and a scholar, and as perfect in each of these capacities as if he had spent his whole life in the battle-field, had dedicated his days and nights to law and politics, or been only a fond dreamer amongst books in the flowery fields of literature. He would have taken the lead in any age as the commander of

an army; have either risen to the dignity of a chancellor or a premier in civil government, or have stood first in the high and ambitious rank of authorship. In him were beautifully blended courage and tenderness, perseverance and patience; justice which would have been stern, but for the softening quality of mercy, high-mindedness, and humbleness, and, above all, a universal love for his fellow men, not disfigured by the weak partiality of unworthy favouritism. He found England in a state of despondency, raised and cheered her, and then elevated her to a much higher station than that from which she had fallen. But for Alfred the Great, England would have been a desert, and never have recovered from the destructive fires and desolating ravages of the Danes. His name will be revered until time shall be no more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EDWARD THE ELDER.

“Awake remembrance of these valiant dead,
And with your puissant arm renew their feats;
You are their heir, you sit upon their throne;
The blood and courage that renowned them
Runs in your veins.—
All do expect that you should rouse yourself,
As did the former lions of your blood.”—SHAKSPERE.

EDWARD the Elder, in the year 901, was, by the unanimous consent of the Saxon nobles, elected king of Wessex. He had already distinguished himself for his valour, as he fought by the side of his father Alfred against Hastings. Although he was the son of Alfred, and elected by the consent of the whole witenagemot, his cousin Ethelwold laid claim to the crown, and took possession of Wimburn, which he vowed death alone should compel him to give up. No sooner, however, did Edward appear before the gates of the town with his army, than Ethelwold fled; and escaping by night, reached Northumbria, where he was gladly received by the Danes, who, doubtless, thinking that they should have a better claim to the land of England, if a

Saxon prince reigned over them, chose him for their sovereign, and at York he was appointed head monarch over all the sea-kings and their chiefs. With the Saxon king at their head, the Danes were not long before they aspired to the sovereignty of the whole island. But Ethelwold could not remain long amongst his subjects without partaking of their piratical habits, so he set up sea-king; and finding that the ocean yielded but a poor harvest, he visited the coast of France, and, either by promises or presents, mustered such a force as enabled him to man a considerable fleet, with which he returned to England and ravaged Mercia. As he landed in Essex, the East Anglian Danes readily joined him. Edward led his army into Lincolnshire in pursuit of Ethelwold, and overtook him a little below Gainsborough. The battle appears to have been fought on a small island, still called Axeholme, which is situated beside the river Trent, and the inhabitants of which are still called "The men of the Isle." Edward, having ravaged the neighbourhood around the isle of Axeholme, ordered his forces to retreat slowly, but on no account to separate. This order the Kentish troops neglected to obey, and either took a different route from the rest of the army, or remained behind to plunder, when Ethelwold, at the head of a superior force, rushed upon them, and they were defeated. Although it appears to have been more of a skirmish than a pitched battle, victory was purchased, on the part of the Danes, by the death of Ethelwold, and England then enjoyed a two years' peace.

After this brief interval, war again broke out. Edward, at the head of his Saxons and Mercians, over-ran and plundered Northumbria. In the following spring, the Danes retaliated, and attacked Mercia on each side of the river Trent. While Edward was busy on the south-eastern coast, repairing and collecting together his ships, a rumour circulated amongst the Danes that he had gone over to the opposite shore with his fleet. Misguided by these tidings, the Danish army passed across the country in the direction of the Severn, plundering every place they approached, and moving about in that irregular manner which showed that they were not apprehensive of any attack. Great was their surprise when they saw a powerful army approaching them; they discovered not the danger until it was too late to fly from it, for Edward was upon them, and there was no alternative but to fight. The battle took place at Wo-

densfield, and thousands of the Danes were slain, for, beside many earls and chiefs, they left two of their kings dead upon the field. The result of this battle established the power of Edward, and insured the safety of the Saxon kingdom. Like his father Alfred, he trusted not to the chances of war alone for security, but protected his frontiers by a line of strong fortresses, and placed a powerful guard over such weak points as had been most open to the invasion of the enemy. He filled these garrisons with chosen soldiers, who, united with the provincials or militia which Alfred had established, rushed out upon the Danes the moment they approached, without either awaiting the command of the king or of his earls, and by such watchful energy they ever kept the enemy in subjection. Inheriting her father's bravery, Ethelfleda, who was now a widow, acted in concert with her brother Edward, and made her name a terror to the Danes on the frontiers of Mercia, so that the governorship which had been intrusted to her husband Ethelred lost none of its power in her hands.

The fortresses which Edward thus reared, in time, became inhabited towns; around them sprung up human habitations and cultivated fields, for the soldiers had their allotted hours of duty and recreation, and when not employed in keeping a watch over the enemy, they followed the more peaceful occupations of agriculture. Many of these fortifications were placed in commanding situations; of such were Wigmore in Herefordshire; Bridgnorth and Cherbury in Shropshire; in Cheshire, Edesbury; in Staffordshire, Stafford and Wedesborough; all admirably adapted to coerce the Welsh upon the western boundaries; while Runcomne and Thelwall in Cheshire, and Bakewell in Derby, served to protect the northern frontier of the Saxon kingdom from the invaders. Manchester, Tamworth, Leicester, Nottingham, and Warwick, also formed strong barriers of defence to that portion of Mercia, while other places guarded the entrance of important rivers, which the Danes had never failed to avail themselves of, when they poured their forces over the land. Never in Alfred's time had the Saxon states presented such an impenetrable frontage as they did during the reign of Edward, and the governorship of his sister Ethelfleda; for the Saxon princess hesitated not to head the forces intrusted to her command, whenever the enemy appeared: since she had shared in all the hardships of those stormy times, and proved herself a

worthy daughter of Alfred. Edward was not long before he was again compelled to take up arms against the northmen, who, after having entered the Severn and ravaged North Wales, carried their devastation into Herefordshire. But the military force established in the fortresses of Hereford and Gloucester, joined by the neighbouring inhabitants, rushed upon the Danes, and compelled them to seek shelter in an adjacent wood. They soon made head again; but Edward, who had by this time drawn his army together, kept so narrow a watch over them, that they despaired of escaping, and were fearful of again measuring their strength with the Saxons. In the night they separated into two divisions and began to retreat. Edward divided his army, pursued and defeated them. Such as escaped the slaughter, fled into Wales, where they for a short time found shelter, and at last sailed over into Ireland. But it is wearisome to run over such a catalogue of combats—of fortresses attacked and defended—of the victors of to-day who were vanquished on the morrow—of battles fought under commanders whose names have many ages ago perished—of castles besieged, the very sites of which are now unknown, and over whose ruins a thousand harvests have probably been reaped. Suffice it, that Edward so far secured his dominions, that the East Anglian Danes chose him for their “lord and patron”—that the Welsh princes acknowledged and submitted to his power, while the king of the Scots addressed him by the title of “father and lord,” and the Danes of Northumbria looked up to him as their supreme sovereign. Such acknowledgments as these are proofs that he left the Saxon monarchy established on a solid foundation, and that he had not neglected the wise plans which his father had drawn out for the better security of his kingdom.

Edward died in Berkshire, about 924, after having reigned for nearly a quarter of a century, and though he had several sons and daughters both by his first and second wife, he appointed by his will his illegitimate son, Athelstan, as his successor to the throne. The Saxon nobles confirmed his choice. Edward had never to contend with such difficulties as beset his father, yet, had he not possessed a great share of the same military talent, the fabric which Alfred had erected might, if less skilfully defended, have again been overthrown. His character would have stood out more boldly on the page of history, had it not been placed by the side of Alfred the Great.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REIGN OF ATHELSTAN.

“Clamour was on the earth.

They darted from their hands many a stout spear;
The sharpened arrows flew—the bows were busy—
The buckler's received the weapon's point.
Bitter was the fight—warriors fell on either side.
The youths lay slain.”

DEATH OF BRYHTNOTH, 991.

ALTHOUGH Athelstan was the illegitimate son of Edward the Elder, and his mother, a woman of surpassing beauty, only the daughter of a humble shepherd, yet he was in his thirtieth year elected to the crown, by the consent of the whole witenagemot, or Saxon parliament, in accordance with the will left by his father. While but a child, his beauty and gentle manners had interested his grandfather Alfred, and the great king, as if foreseeing the splendid station to which the future monarch would one day rise, had with his own hand invested the boy with the honours of knighthood; had doubtless many a time placed him upon his own knee, and as he sat in childish pomp, in his purple garment, jewelled belt, and with his Saxon sword, buried in its golden sheath, dangling by his side, had instilled into his youthful mind those precepts which had guided his own career, and shown him how he should think and act when he became king. When Alfred died, his daughter Ethelfleda took Athelstan with her into Mercia, and joined with her husband Ethelred in watching narrowly over his education; so that when he was called upon to ascend the throne of Wessex, there could be but few found in that day whose scholastic and military attainments excelled those of Athelstan.

At the time of Athelstan's accession, Sigtryg, a grandson of Ragnar Lodbrog's, reigned over a portion of Northumbria, and although, like all the rest of the sea-kings, he was a bold and fearless pirate, and still worse, was guilty of the murder of his own brother, yet Athelstan gave to him his own sister in marriage, and the nuptials of the Danish king and the Saxon princess were celebrated with all the barbaric pomp of the period at Tamworth. What motive Athelstan had for estab-

lishing this union, we are at a loss to divine. It has been attributed to fear—a wish to conciliate a powerful enemy. This could not be the case: for we find the Saxon king preparing to invade his dominions a few months after he had married his sister. The conditions of the marriage were that Sigtryg should renounce his idolatry, and become a Christian—propositions which he swore to accede to by his own heathen oath on the bracelets; and, with his heart still clinging to the altars of Odin, he was baptized and married. He soon grew weary of his new wife and his new religion, put on his golden armlets again, and, solemnly swearing by his heathen gods, renounced them both: for, reigning over a land inhabited solely by unbelieving Danes, we can scarcely marvel at such an act when performed by a pagan, who understood not the attributes of the true God. Athelstan lost no time in preparing to resent the insult offered to his religion and to his sister, but began at once to march his forces towards Northumbria. Eager, however, as he had been to arm, when he reached the Danish dominions he found that death had stepped in before him; for Sigtryg, after renouncing both his Christian and his heathen creed, had died, and the sons whom he had had by a former wife fled at the approach of Athelstan. Anlaf, in his ship, escaped to Ireland; and Godifrid sought shelter and protection under Constantine, the king of the Scots. To the latter, Athelstan sent messengers, demanding of him to deliver up the Danish prince. Constantine prepared to obey the peremptory summons, but during the journey Godifrid escaped. After enduring many perils both by sea and land, he at last fell into the hands of Athelstan, whose anger had by that time subsided, for he received the poor fugitive courteously, and treated him kindly, and gave him a warm welcome to his own court. But four days of princely ease in a Saxon palace were quite enough for the great grandson of the stormy old seaking, Ragnar Lodbrog, and on the fifth he fled, seized a ship, and set up pirate, as his forefathers had formerly done; for “he was,” says one of the old chroniclers, “as incapable as a fish of living out of water.” Although Athelstan added Northumbria to his dominions, the Danes were resolved not to give up a country of which they had so long retained possession without a struggle. Many a Vikingr still existed, who claimed kindred with the grandsons of Ragnar Lodbrog; and tidings soon

reached the rocky coast of Norway, that the Saxon king had laid claim to the Anglo-Danish territories, over which their brethren had ruled as kings; and though the ivory horn of Hastings no longer summoned their sea-horses from the creeks and harbours in which they were stabled, they soon again began to ride over the road of the swans, and to climb the stormy waves of the Baltic in their armed ships. Such formidable preparations were made for the invasion as threatened at last to overwhelm for ever the Saxon monarchy. The rumour of such a victory rang through England, and arrested the gaze of the neighbouring nations. We will briefly glance at the cause of this great commotion.

It appears that Constantine had violated the treaty which he had made with Athelstan, and that the latter ravaged the Scottish dominions both by sea and land, carrying his army among the Picts and Scots, and the ancient Cymry, who inhabited the valley of the Clyde, and his ships as far north as Caithness. Unable to compete with the Saxon forces, Constantine began to look abroad for assistance, and formed a league with Anlaf, who, as we have before stated, had escaped to Ireland, where he was made king over some little state. He, it will be borne in mind, had fled from Northumbria at the approach of Athelstan, and doubtless considered that he had as just a claim to the throne of Northumbria as Athelstan had to that of Wessex. The Welsh princes, who, still settled down as petty sovereigns, had felt the weight of the strong arm of Athelstan, and readily confederated with Constantine and Anlaf—the Danes of Northumbria, East Anglia, and Cumbria, had so long been settlers in the country, that self-defence alone compelled them to league themselves against a king who threatened ere long to reduce the whole of Dane-land to his sway. Added to these, were the ships already fitting out in Norway, or breasting the billows of the Baltic. Thus were arrayed against Athelstan and his handful of Saxons, the whole forces of Scotland—the Irish fleet commanded by Anlaf—the remnant of the ancient Britons—the Danes of East-Anglia and Northumbria—together with the legions who were hourly pouring in from Norway and the Baltic—a force formidable enough to have blanched the cheek of the great Alfred himself, had he lived to have looked upon it.

Athelstan saw the storm as it gathered about him, and know-

ing that it would before long break over him, he prepared himself like a man who is resolved to buffet it—who is determined to do his best to weather the tempest, whatever may betide. He resolved not to sit listlessly down with folded arms to be drenched by the overwhelming torrent, if safety could be won by hard struggling. He offered high rewards to every warrior who chose to fight in his cause; and Thorolf and Egil, two of those restless sea-pirates who cared not whether they plundered or slew for themselves or others, so long as it brought in wealth, arrived with three hundred followers, and entered the service of Athelstan. Another celebrated chief, named Rollo, also sent him assistance from Normandy. The war was commenced by Anlaf, who sailed into the Humber with a large fleet which consisted of about six hundred ships, while the forces under his command numbered at least forty thousand men. They overpowered the Saxon army which Athelstan had placed on the edge of the Deira and the Northern frontier of Mercia; and the remnant fled to the head-quarters occupied by the Saxon king. Anlaf is said to have visited Athelstan's camp, disguised in the character of a minstrel, as Alfred himself had before time done, when he reconnoitred the stronghold of Godrun. Although he escaped, he was discovered, and Athelstan was warned to remove his tent, by which means his life was saved, as a night attack was made upon the camp, and the bishop of Sherbourne, who had exchanged his mitre for a helmet, and who soon after arrived with his soldiers, was stationed in the quarter which the king had so recently quitted, and fell a victim, instead of Athelstan, for whose destruction the attack was planned. After this night combat, in which the enemy proved victorious, Athelstan knew that there was no time to be lost, and therefore began to arrange the forces for the battle, which was to decide his fate. Anlaf also drew up his large army in readiness for the approaching affray. The Saxon king placed his boldest troops at the front of the battle; leaving them to the command of Egil, who, though only a hired chieftain, was a brave and honourable soldier. To Thorolf he entrusted the followers whom he had been accustomed to lead, mingling with them a few of his own Saxon soldiers, who appear to have been steadier, and better able to repel the attacks of the Irish who had come over with Anlaf, and were in the habit of moving quickly from place to place, and by their changes disarranging the order of battle.

Over the Mercian warriors, and the brave English hearts which London had poured forth, he placed Turketul, the chancellor, and bade him, when the war-cry was sounded, to charge headlong upon Constantine, and the Scots whom he commanded. Athelstan himself headed the West Saxons, placing them opposite to the point occupied by Anlaf, as if fearful of trusting any other than himself in the most dangerous post. Anlaf altered not his position, but stood front to front with his forces, drawn up opposite the Saxon monarch.

Behind the right wing of the army of Anlaf there stretched a vast wood; facing, and nearly out-flanking it, were drawn up the soldiers Thorolf commanded; who, eager as a hawk to rush upon the quarry, was the first to plunge headlong upon the enemy, and in a moment he was in the very thickest of the ranks, having far outstripped all, but a few of the foremost of his companions. Adils, a British prince, who fought under the banner of Anlaf, wheeled his Welsh forces round, and severed Thorolf and his friends from the rest of their followers, and slew them. Egil saw the standard of Thorolf surrounded by the enemy, beheld it rocking and reeling above the heads of the combatants as it was borne towards the wood, and conscious that his brave companion in arms had not betrayed his trust; that the banner of Thorolf was never seen to retreat whilst its leader was alive; he, with his shield slung behind his back, and wielding his huge claymore, rushed on like a dreaded thunderbolt to revenge his death. The forces which Athelstan trusted to his command deserted him not; they hewed their way through the enemy's ranks, they pursued them into the wood, and Adils fell in the fight, for the Welsh wing, which occupied the front of the forest, was defeated with terrible slaughter.

Meantime, in the centre of the plain, the combat raged with unabated fury; arrows, darts, and javelins, were abandoned; for it was now the close hand to hand contest, when blows were dealt at arm's length with the sword, and the battle-axe, and the club, bristling with sharp steel spikes, which bit through, or crushed the heaviest helmet;—when the huge two-handed claymore was swung with giant arms, and men fell before it like grass before the scythe of the mower in a summer field;—when blood flowed and none heeded it, but the combatant placed his foot upon the dead that the blow might fall with heavier force;—when vassal and chief rolled over together;—when horse and

rider fell, yet scarcely broke for a moment the enraged ranks who passed over them—while over all the war-cry, and the shouts of the combatants rang, drowning the moans of the wounded and the dying. Cool and collected amid this breathless struggle, the chancellor Turketul selected a chosen band from amongst the Londoners and the brave men of Worcestershire, who were renowned for their valour, and who feared nothing while Singin was at their head. These the warlike chancellor placed in close order, and himself leading the way, they plunged headlong upon Constantine and his Scots, Turketul paying no more regard to the arrows that stuck in his armour than a rhinoceros would if pierced with a dozen pins, nor did he halt until he had dealt a heavy blow on the helmet of the Caledonian monarch. Had not the Scots rushed up in a body to the rescue, Turketul would have dragged their king, horse and all, into the Saxon ranks; they, however, came just in time to save him.

Never had a warrior a narrower escape with his life than Turketul. He was surrounded by the Scots, foremost amongst whom was the son of Constantine—who also narrowly escaped from being captured—when, just as the weapons were uplifted to despatch the chancellor, Singin rushed in at the head of his Worcestershire warriors, slew the Scottish prince with a single blow of his battle-axe, and rescued Turketul. The well-timed attack led on by Singin completed the defeat of the Scottish army, and they made no other attempt to rally; Constantine escaped. Leaving Turketul, Egil, and Singin to pursue the routed forces of the Welsh and Scots, we must now glance at that part of the field where the opposing forces, commanded by Athelstan and Anlaf, were engaged. Here the combat continued to rage unabated. The figure of the Saxon king was seen in the very thickest of the fight, and while he was hemmed in by his enemies, and showering down blows upon all who came within the reach of his weapon, his sword suddenly broke short at the handle. To receive the blows which were aimed at him upon his shield and snatch up another weapon were scarcely the work of a moment; but during that brief interval, Anlaf's troops obtained a slight advantage, and began to press more heavily upon the Saxon ranks. It were then that Anlaf, suddenly turning his head, beheld confusion in his rear; for Turketul and Egil, having returned from the pursuit, had thus suddenly

hemmed in the only portion of the enemy's forces that remained upon the field. With the powerful forces of Athelstan before, and an enemy, already flushed with victory, attacking him in the rear, Anlaf saw his hitherto brave soldiers wavering on all sides; the centre of his strong line was broken, and to the left and right all was hurry, retreat, confusion, and slaughter, while in the centre the Saxon banner waved triumphant, and the loud cry of victory rang out in front, and was echoed back from the rear of the defeated army:—the conflict was at an end—the combined forces fled on every hand, and the conquerors pursued the flying enemy until their arms became weary with slaughter. Far as the eye could reach, it rested upon a long line of the dying and the dead. Never during the wars of Alfred had so many fallen upon one field as perished in the battle of Brunanburg.

But few of the poems which have been written to commemorate these ancient victories have descended to us perfect. That which was composed to celebrate the Saxon triumph at the battle of Brunanburg, has, however, been more fortunate, having found a place even in the Saxon chronicle itself. Although it has been frequently translated, and quoted by many historians, there is something so forbidding to the eye in the short, heavy lines, something so difficult to comprehend, in the lengthy extension, and abrupt transition of the sentences, that we shall venture upon a somewhat free adaptation of the literal version, yet endeavour to preserve unaltered the original thought and spirit of the poem:

ANGLO-SAXON SONG ON THE VICTORY AT BRUNANBURG.

Athelstan, king of earls, the lord, the giver of golden bracelets to the heroes, and his brother, the noble Edmund the elder, won a lasting glory in battle by slaughter with the edges of their swords at Brunanburg. They, with the rest of the family of the children of Edward, clove asunder the wall of shields, and hewed down the waving banners, for it was but natural to them from their warlike ancestry to defend their treasures, their home, and their land, against all enemies in the battle-field

From the time the sun rose up in the morning hour, to when the great star of the eternal Lord, that noble creature, God's candle bright, hastened to his setting, they pursued and destroyed the Scottish bands, and the men of the fleet in numbers dying, fell, and the wide field was everywhere covered with the blood of warriors; many a soldier lay there dead with darts struck down; many heroes over whose shields the showery arrows were shot, whom the battle would never again weary, and who would never more boast that they were of the race of Mars the Red

Throughout the day the West-Saxons fiercely pressed on the loathed bands, they scattered the rear of the army, and hewed down the fugitives with their strong mill-sharpened swords. The Mercians shrunk not from the hard-hand-play, from the men, who with Anlaf over the ever beating deep, in the ships sheltered, sought this land for the deadly fight. In that blood dyed battle-field, five kings in the bloom of youth did the sword send to slumber, also seven of Anlaf's earls, and numbers of the ship-borne army slept with the slain.

The Scots with the lord of the Northmen were chased away—fate compelled him to seek the noisy deep, and with a small host in his floating ship on the felon flood he escaped with his life, so also Constantine with his routed remnant in hasty flight, hurried to the north. Silent sat the hoary hero of Hilda amongst his kindred, for small cause had he to boast who had left his friends slain in combat; and his son, the fair-haired youth, unused to the conflict, mangled with wounds in the battle field.

Inwood the aged, nor Anlaf, no more with the wreck of their armies could now exult or boast that they, on the stern battle-field, were better at lowering the banners, 'mid the clashing of spears, and the crashing of weapons, and the meeting of heroes on the field of slaughter, than the sons of Edward, whom they opposed. On the roaring sea; over the deep waters, a dreary and silent remnant, the northman sailed in their nailed ships, and sought in Dublin and Ireland to bury their disgrace.

Athelstan and his brother again sought their country, the west Saxon land from fight triumphant. They left behind them, to devour the prey, the ominous kite and the black raven, with horned beak, the horse-toad, and the eagle, swift to feast on the white flesh; the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf of the weald.

The poem then concludes by stating "as the books of the old historians inform us, never had there before been so great a slaughter in this island since the Saxons first came over the sea to conquer the Welsh, and gain the land." The victory of Brunanburg made Athelstan the monarch of England, for not only had he subjugated the Danes in East Anglia and Northumbria, but had compelled the Welsh also to 'acknowledge his power. As the eyes of Europe had been turned upon him, before he entered the field against the combined forces his valour defeated, so did the different nations now rival each other in their congratulations on his victory. England was no longer the unknown island, which in former times the Romans had such difficulty to discover; but began to raise her head proudly amongst the neighbouring nations. The exiles who were compelled to flee from the ravages of the Northmen, he received and succoured in his own court. He sheltered his sister Elgiva, and her son Louis, when her husband, the king of France, was dethroned and imprisoned. He was appealed to for advice and

assistance, when a dispute arose about the succession to the throne of France; and as he adjudged, so was the matter decided. His sisters were sought in marriage by powerful princes; his consent was courted by embassies, backed with costly presents; and he even fitted out a fleet, and sent it to the aid of France—thus being the first to cement a union with that kingdom, whose history in latter days has become so closely interwoven with our own. Even Otho, who was afterwards surnamed the great, obtained the hand of Athelstan's sister in marriage; and there is still in existence, in the Cotton library, a beautiful manuscript copy of the Gospels, in Latin, which was presented by Otho and his sister to Athelstan, on which the Anglo-Saxon kings are said to have sworn when they took the coronation oath. He was also honoured with the friendship of Henry the First, the emperor of Germany, and by the alliance of his son in marriage with his sister Editha. Athelstan also formed a league with Harold, king of Norway, and through the instrumentality of the two kings, the system of piracy, which had long rendered the ocean as perilous as the tempests that sweep over it, was, by the interference of Harold, and the intercession of Athelstan, put down: for Harold not only chased the pirates from his own dominions, but pursued them over the sea until he overtook, and destroyed them, and when he had cleared the ocean of these ancient robbers, he drew up a code of severe laws for the punishment of all who dared to attack either the British or the Norwegian fleets. In such high estimation was Athelstan held by Harold, that he sent his son Haco over to England to be educated in the Saxon court, and so delighted was the Norway king with the progress the young prince made in his studies and warlike exercises, that he presented to Athelstan a beautiful ship, with purple sails, surrounded with shields that were richly gilt, while the prow, or figure at the head, was wrought out of pure gold. To the prince, the Saxon king presented a costly sword, which Haco the Good, (as he was afterwards called, when he became king) treasured until the day of his death. When Harold died, and some difficulty arose as to the succession of Haco to the throne of Norway, Athelstan provided him with soldiers and a strong fleet, and thus enabled him to take possession of his kingdom. On the thrones of France, Bretagne, and Norway, sat three kings who were all indebted to Athelstan for their crowns; a strong proof of the power and dignity to which England had risen.

He is said to have restored Howel to the kingdom of Wales, and Constantine to the throne of Scotland, after having conquered their dominions. Having assisted to dethrone Eric, and to place the crown of Norway on the head of Haco, he made the former king of Northumbria, as a proof of the respect he bore to the memory of his father Harold. Nor was he less liberal to the monks, but contributed freely to enriching the monasteries, both with money, books, and costly vessels, while several are said to have been built at his own expense. Like his grandfather Alfred, he was also generous to the poor; from the royal farms he ordered to be given to the needy every month a measure of meal, a gammon of bacon, or a ram worth fourpence, besides clothing once a year. These were to be distributed by the gerefa, who appears to have stood in the same position as an overseer, or relieving officer, having also to perform the duty of chief constable, and to warn the hundred when the folk-mote or folcgemot was to assemble. If he neglected to distribute the royal charity, he was fined thirty shillings, which was divided amongst the poor of the neighbouring tything. High, however, as the character of Athelstan stands, it is not free from the stains which too often blotted the brightest names that adorned this barbarous age, though we cannot tell, at this remote period, how reluctantly he may have yielded to the stern sentence of his witenagemot, when he consigned his brother to death. Edwin had been leagued with others to oppose the accession of Athelstan to the throne, and the king ordered him to be placed within the

“Rotten carcass of a boat, nor rigged,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast,”

and without even an oar, to be launched upon the ocean, and left to chance, and the mercy of the waves. For some time the unfortunate prince continued to keep afloat within sight of land, until at last the wind rose, and perceiving that every billow but rolled him further into the hopeless ocean, he preferred an instant to a lingering death, and leaped boldly into the deep. His body was afterwards washed ashore, and for seven years Athelstan is said to have mourned over his brother's death, with deep and bitter sorrow. Athelstan died about the year 940 or 941; and, as he left no children, he was succeeded by his brother Edmund.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REIGNS OF EDMUND AND EDRED.

“The time has been, my senses would have cool’d
 To hear a night shriek; and my fell of hair
 Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
 As life were in’t: I have supped full with horrors;
 Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
 Cannot once start me.—Wherefore was that cry?
 The king, my lord, is dead.”—SHAKSPEARE.

EDMUND, surnamed the Elder, had scarcely attained his eighteenth year, when he ascended the Saxon throne. Many of Athelstan’s former enemies were still alive, and Anlaf, who had played so prominent a part at the battle of Brunanburg, again came over from Ireland, and placed himself at the head of the Northumbrian Danes, with whom he marched into Mercia, attacked Tamworth, and, in his first battle, defeated the Saxons. England was not yet destined to be subject to the sway of one king, for, after several defeats, Edmund employed the Archbishops of York and Canterbury to negotiate with Anlaf, and peace was concluded on the conditions that the Northumbrian prince was to reign over that part of England which extended to the north of Watling Street—the boundaries of which it is difficult to define. Another clause was also annexed, which placed the Saxon throne in greater jeopardy than it had ever before been; for Edmund entered into an agreement with Anlaf, that whoever survived the other should become the sole and undisputed sovereign of England. Death saved the Saxons from the degrading and dangerous position into which they had fallen, for Anlaf died in the following year, and after his death Edmund lost no time in taking possession of that portion of the kingdom which had been wrested from him by the valour of the Danish king.

It may be that the youth or inexperience of Edmund made him fearful of measuring his strength against a veteran like Anlaf, for when he had once resolved to reduce the Danes to authority, he acted as became a descendant of Alfred, and not only subjected Northumbria to his sway, but drove the Danes from

the towns they had so long occupied on the frontiers of Mercia, clearing the whole line of country from Stamford to Lincoln; and, crossing the Trent, he drove them from the cities of Leicester, Nottingham, and Derby, thus sweeping the whole of the midland counties of the Danes, and peopling the strongholds from which he had driven them with Saxons, and amply making up for the vacillating weakness which marked the first year of his reign. Neither did his conquests end here; he next invaded Cumbria, unnecessarily tortured the sons of Dunmail, and then gave the small state to Malcolm of Scotland, on condition that he should defend the northern dominions, both by sea and land, against all invaders. Strange as it may appear, he was assisted in the subjugation of this petty kingdom by one of the Welsh kings, although Cumberland and Westmoreland, which formed the kingdom of Cumbria, were at this time inhabited by a remnant of the ancient Britons, over whom reigned Dunmail, its last Celtic king. Although the reign of Edmund is among the briefest of our early Saxon kings, containing but the mere entry of his name, a battle or two, and then his untimely death, embracing, from his first assuming the crown to his being borne to the grave, not more than five years, it offers to the contemplative mind much matter for meditation. He commenced his reign by a dishonourable concession, such as Athelstan would never have thought of, though it had cost him both his kingdom and his life in resisting it. He ended it by an act of cruelty, causing the eyes of the sons of Dunmail to be put out. Shortly after this, he fell in his own banqueting-hall, by the hand of a robber, in the midst of his nobles; while the wine-cup was circulating in celebration of the great Saxon feast held in memory of St. Augustine, he was struck dead by the dagger of Leof. At what place the deed was done, how the robber obtained admittance into the hall, whether angry words were exchanged between the assassin and the king, nothing certain is known—so much do the accounts vary in the old chronicles, although all admit the fact.

Leof had been banished for six years; he suddenly appeared in the presence of the king; his object, beyond doubt, was to slay him. Could we but prove that the murderer belonged to the ancient Cymry, we should probably not be far in error in concluding that he came to revenge the tortures which had been inflicted on the British princes, who were blinded by the

command of Edmund. Vengeance only could have induced an armed and banished robber to rush into the presence of the king, when he was feasting in the midst of his nobles, and there, on his own hearth, to deprive him of life. Strange that the scene of an event so well known, should be buried in obscurity. There must have been motives that impelled the murderer to perpetrate such a deed, which were unfavourable to the character of Edmund, or we should have met with something more than the mere entry of his violent death in the early chronicles. He was slain in his twenty-third year—in the dawn of manhood; but where he fell, or in what place he was buried, history has not left a single record that we can rely upon. Malmesbury says, "His death opened the door for fable all over England." How ominous his rising! how dark and sudden his setting! what splendour surrounded his noonday career; yet, withal, his life might be written in four brief sentences—"He perilled his kingdom in his youth—nobly redeemed the false step he had taken—committed an act of inhuman cruelty—was afterwards murdered, in the year 946.

Edred succeeded Edmund, for the son of the latter was but a child when his father was slain. They were both sons of Edward the Elder by his second marriage, and, from the date of his death, must have been mere infants when he died. Both could claim the great Alfred as their grandfather.

During the short reign of Anlaf, and the subjection of Northumbria by Edmund, we lose sight of Eric, the son of Harold of Norway, to whom Athelstan had generously given the crown of this northern kingdom, out of the respect he bore to his father. But Eric cared not to occupy a peaceful throne: if he was to be a king at all, he was resolved it should be a sea-king, so he took to his ships, and left his subjects to shift for themselves as they best could; for he had often, during his sovereignty, whiled away the pleasant summer months with a little pirating—had often treated his followers to an agreeable excursion on the sea, where they plundered all the ships they could, and conquered and slew their crews, no doubt capturing our own merchants, whenever a chance offered. After amusing himself and his companions for some time, by preying upon all who came in his way, around the coast of Scotland, he ventured over into Ireland, gathered what he could there, crossed the sea again, and ravaged Wales, picking up along the

northern coast, whenever he came near home, all the choice spirits he could find about the Orkneys and the Hebrides. With these he roamed at his pleasure, plundering wherever he could, and performing such feats on the ocean as Robin Hood and his merry men are, in a later day, supposed to have done in our old English forests. He was also joined by many of the most renowned sea-robbers from Norway, for the bold Vikingr found but little encouragement to plunder under the government of "Haco the Good." When Eric was weary of these rough Midsummer holidays, he came back again to his kingdom, moored his ships, and placed his battle-axe upon the "smoky beam" until the following spring, never troubling himself about law or justice, but leaving his subjects either to do as they pleased, or follow the lawless example he set them:—he quaffed his cup, and sang his stormy sea-songs, and little recked Eric the Norwegian how the world went, so long as he could get out upon the windy ocean, and meet with prey and plunder upon the billows of the deep. All seems to have gone merrily with him, until, in an evil hour, he was either tempted or persuaded to ravage England. Where he landed is not known, but his success is said to have been great, and when he returned to Northumbria laden with plunder, his Danish subjects received him with warm welcome; although they had but just before sworn fidelity to Edred, still their hearts were with the daring sea-king, and they hailed him the more eagerly since Edred, after having received their oaths of allegiance, had turned his back upon the north. The Saxon king, although young, soon turned round, and punished the wavering Danes for their disloyalty. They again promised submission; but scarcely had he reached York before Eric was upon his heels, and so unexpectedly did he fall upon the army of the Saxon king, that he cut off the rear-guard before he retreated. Edred once more wheeled round, over-ran Northumbria, compelled them to renounce Eric, inflicted a heavy fine, again received hostages and promises of allegiance, and took his departure. Eric but lingered on the sea until he was fairly out of sight, and then prepared to take vengeance upon the subjects who had disowned him.

There is but little doubt that the Danes who renounced Eric were backed by a strong Saxon force which Edred had taken the precaution of leaving in the neighbourhood. A battle was

fought, which is said to have lasted the whole day, and in it Eric, with five other sea-kings, was slain. Edred speedily availed himself of the advantages obtained by this victory. He carried away captive many of the Danish chiefs who had been engaged in the rebellion, imprisoned Wulfstan, an archbishop, who had been foremost in heading the revolt, divided the kingdom into baronies and hundreds, over which he placed his own officers, and overawing the country by strong garrisons, he at last reduced it into a greater state of order and subjection than it had ever before been since the Danes were first allowed to occupy it. Although still inhabited by Danes, they were no longer allowed even a sub-king to reign over them, but, like the rest of the Saxon states, were under the sole government of Edred, and thus rendered less independent than they had ever been during the reign of the victorious Athelstan.

So distinguished a sea-king as Eric was not likely to perish in battle without awakening the genius of the Scandinavian muse. "I have dreamt a dream," begins the northern poet; "at the golden dawn of morning I was carried into the hall of Valhalla, and bade to prepare the banquet for the reception of the brave who had fallen in the battle. I blew the brazen trumpet of Heimdal, and awoke the heroes from their sleep. I bade them to arise and arrange the seats and drinking-cups of skulls, as for the coming of a king."

"'What meaneth all this noise?' exclaimed Braghi; 'why are so many warriors in motion, and for whom are all these seats prepared?'"

"'It is because Eric is on his way to Valhalla,' replied Odin, 'whose coming I await with joy. Let the bravest go forth to meet him.'"

"'How is it that his coming pleaseth thee more than that of any other king?'"

"'Because,' answered Odin, 'in more battle-fields hath his sword been red with blood; because in more places hath his deep-dyed spear spread terror, for he hath sent more than any other king to the palace of the dead.'"

"I heard a rushing sound as of mighty waters: the hall was filled with shadows. Then Odin exclaimed: 'I salute thee, Eric! Enter, brave warrior; thrice welcome art thou to Valhalla. Say what kings accompany thee?—how many have come with thee from the combat?'"

“ ‘Five kings accompany me,’ replied Eric; ‘and I am the sixth.’ ”

Although Eric was baptized, before he was placed on the throne of Northumbria by Athelstan, yet the northern scald was resolved to rescue him from his Christian paradise, and place him in those halls, which he thought were more befitting the spirit of a sea-king to dwell in. After the death of Eric, many of the Anglo-Danes became Christians, and several enrolled themselves amongst the religious orders, thus becoming servants in the churches, which it had hitherto been their chief delight to burn and destroy.

It was during the reign of Edred that the celebrated or notorious Dunstan rose into such notice, for there is scarcely another character throughout the whole range of history, upon which the opinions of writers vary so much as in their summary of this singular man. Madness, excessive sanctity, enthusiasm, hypocrisy, cruelty, cunning, ambition, tyranny, have all been called in, to account for the motives by which he was actuated. With some the saint, and with others the sinner, has predominated, according to the medium by which his actions have been surveyed by different historians. It is difficult to sit down and contemplate his character in that grave mood which is so essential to depict the truths of history, for with Satan on the one hand, and the saint on the other, the bellowing of the fiend, and the clattering of the anvil, we get so confused between the monk and the “brazen head,” that we seem in a land of “wild romance,” instead of standing on the sober shore of history. We will, however, deal as fairly with the dead, as the few facts we are in possession of enable us to do, without sacrificing our honest judgment. But first we must consign the remains of Edred to the grave of his forefathers. He died in 955, after having reigned nine years. He was afflicted with a slow, wasting disease, which gave to him the appearance of old age, although at his death he had numbered but little more than thirty winters. He was succeeded by Edwin, the son of Edmund the elder.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EDWIN AND ELGIVA.

“He was a man
Of an unbounded stomach, ever ranking
Himself with princes ;——
His own opinion was his law,
He would say untruths ; and be ever double,
Both in his words and meaning. He was never
But where he meant to ruin, pitiful.

He was a scholar, and a ripe, and good one ;
Exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading ;
Lofty and sour, to them that loved him not,
But to those men that sought him sweet as summer.”

SHAKSPERE.

EDWIN was not more than sixteen years of age when he ascended the throne. Although so young, he had married a beautiful and noble lady of his own age, who appears to have been somewhat too closely related to him to please the stern dignitaries who were then placed at the head of the church, for it was at this period when the rigid discipline of the Benedictine monks was first introduced into England. Odo, a Dane, and a descendant from those savage sea-kings who destroyed the abbeys of Croyland and Peterborough, was, at this time, archbishop of Canterbury, for it was not then uncommon to place the pastoral crook in warlike hands, as there are many instances on record which show that those who could best wield the battle-axe were entrusted with the crosier; and Odo had served both under Edward and Athelstan, and had fought and prayed at the battle of Brunanburg. But before describing the most important events of the reign of Edwin, we must give a brief sketch of the life of Dunstan, and endeavour to throw a little light upon the dark shadows which have so long settled down upon his character.

Dunstan, who plays so prominent a part at this period, appears to have lived near Glastonbury, and while yet a boy, seems to have been fond of visiting an ancient British church which had probably been erected by the Christians soon after the departure of the Romans. At a very early period of his life, he was a be-

liever in dreams and visions, and while yet unknown, imagined that a venerable figure appeared to him and pointed out the spot on which he was one day to erect a monastery. His studies were encouraged, and his abilities are said to have been so great that he was soon enabled to outstrip all his companions in learning. We next find him suffering from a severe fever, probably the result of excessive application, and which at last produced a state of dreadful delirium. In the height of his madness, he seized a stick and rushed out of his chamber, running with the speed of a maniac over hills and plains; and fancying in his frantic flight that a pack of wild hounds were pursuing him. Night found him in the neighbourhood of a church, on which workmen had been employed during the day; the invalid ascended the scaffold, and without injuring himself, got safely into the church, where he sank into a heavy slumber, from which he awoke not until morning, when he found his intellects restored, though, to draw a charitable conclusion from any of his future actions, we should be justified in believing that there were intervals when the disease returned. He had sufficient patronage to obtain an introduction to the church or monastery at Glastonbury, where he again renewed his studies, and besides obtaining a thorough knowledge of the literature of that age, he appears to have excelled in mathematics, music, writing, engraving, and painting, and also to have been a skilful worker in metals. Such talents as these, when so few excelled in any branch of the polite or finer mechanical arts, could not fail of bringing him speedily into notice, and he seems to have had an introduction to the royal palace early in the reign of Edmund. No greater proof of his intellectual attainments can be adduced, than his being accused while at court of dealing in the arts of magic; for so far had he shot beyond the ignorance and error of the age, that what could now be readily comprehended by an ordinary understanding, was in that benighted period attributed to supernatural agency; and so strongly did the current of prejudice set in against him, that Dunstan was driven from the court.

We can imagine with what shouts of derision he was pursued, and with what loathing and heartburning he must have quitted the palace as he fled before his insulting enemies, who, not content with having hurled him from his high estate, pursued him, and threw him into a miry ditch, beside a marsh, where they left him to escape or perish. We can picture him reaching

his friend's house, at about a mile distant, the sorrow that wrapped his heart as he looked upon his blighted prospects, the anger that lighted his eye, and the burning scorn which he poured in withering words upon the unlettered herd, as he breathed his sorrow, and suffering, and disgrace, into the bosom of his friend, and, with a sigh, looked upon all his hopes thus undeservedly overthrown. For a short period, we here lose sight of Dunstan; when we next meet with him, he is on the point of marriage with a maiden to whom he appears to have been greatly attached. He is dissuaded from marriage by his relation, the bishop of Ælfheag, who tells him that such inclinations only emanate from the Evil one, and persuades him to become a monk. Love for a time made Dunstan eloquent, and our only marvel is, that a man who was so susceptible of the tender passion should, on a future day, become the unfeeling opponent of marriage, and wield the power he possessed with an unrelenting and iron arm over every priest who had entered into this honourable bond of union. For a long time the bishop argued in vain. Dunstan had then many reasons to urge in favour of love and marriage; and probably, at that period, never dreamed that he should have to use both force and argument against them; but he seems to have been doomed to suffer disappointment: and, although he endured it, it soured his better nature, for, like Jonah's gourd, all that promised him hope and delight seemed as if it only grew up to perish a withering mockery. Sickness again attacked him, a disease that brought him well nigh to death's door; he gave up all hopes of recovery, he renounced all earthly happiness, and when he began to turn his inward eye to that spiritual existence beyond the grave, earth heaved up slowly, and to him sadly, and shut out the coveted land of which he had obtained a dim glimpse, but that earth was no longer to him the garden of hope and love. He rose from his sick bed a melancholy and altered man; became a monk, and in his cold, grey, stony cell, which shut him up as in a grave, from the warm womanly heart he had once so fondly doted upon, he vowed to lead a life of celibacy.

Up to this period of his life, Dunstan wins our sympathy: we have seen him driven out, amid hooting and derision, from the court; we have seen the golden link of love, which still bound him to mankind, snapped heartlessly asunder; and now we behold him buried, with all his genius and learning, in the lonely

cell of a silent monastery. No marvel that, like the weary lion who has been hard pressed by the cruel hunters, he at last got up and shook himself—looked round with disgust upon the narrow cave he had been driven into, and glared with scorn and rage as he thought upon the puny power he had fled from; then shook his majestic mane and rushed out, and filled the whole neighbourhood with his roar.

How from his soul he must have spurned the ignorant mass who came to look at him in the cell which he had dug in the earth, and which seems to have been but little larger than a common grave! What contempt he must have felt for the illiterate crowd, as he toiled in his smithy, to hear them attribute the roaring of his bellows, and the clattering of his hammer, to the howling and bellowing of the devil; and, even sick and weary as he was of the world, a suppressed smile must have played about the corner of his mouth, as he saw the credulous crowd gather around, who believed that he had seized the foul fiend by the nose. Still it is hard to suppose that a man of his learning and talent would for a moment lend himself to so improbable a tale: he might, however, have seen the power he was likely to gain from such a rumour, so let it take its course, leaving those to credit it who were simple enough to do so. The making for himself a narrow cell, and living in it for a given time, was no uncommon penance at that period, when hermits were found in lonely places, and priests, who had been driven from their monasteries by the Danes, were compelled to shelter in caves and forests, which they frequently never quitted until death. Guthlac, on the lonely island at Croyland, differed but little from Dunstan in his self-inflicted probation.

It is, after all, difficult to suppose that his fame spread amongst the highest ranks, through an idle and vulgar rumour being circulated of his having pulled Satan's nose. Such a report would never have drawn the Lady Ethelfleda, who had descended from Alfred the Great, to visit him—to extol his conversation, and to praise his piety; to introduce him to the king, and, at her death, to leave him all her wealth. Still less likely is it that such a fabrication would have raised him high in the estimation of the venerable Chancellor Turketul, the man who had so distinguished himself, in the reign of Athelstan, at the battle of Brunanburg. Nor can we believe

that a grandson of the great Alfred would be so credulous as to appoint him abbot of Glastonbury, unless he had had some solid proofs of his learning and piety; for Edred made him his confidential friend and councillor, and entrusted to his care all his treasure.* We will not acquit him of ambition, nor deny that he might have deviated a little from a fair and honest course to obtain power; that he became cautious and reserved; for the man who in his younger days had been driven from the court for his candour, and rolled in a ditch by those who were either envious of his talents or too ignorant to appreciate his high intellectual attainments, would naturally become more wary for the future. He who but received hardship and insult as a reward for his wisdom, would best display it afterwards by remaining silent. Martyrs to a good cause act otherwise; but all men covet not such immortality. We are painting the character of a man disappointed in ambition and love; yet eager as of old for power—such elements, though imperfect, are human. The man who inflicted stripes upon himself for refusing the see of Winchester, in the hopes of one day being made Archbishop of Canterbury, had before been whipped for his honesty; and although such deception would ill become one who aspired to be a saint, it would be pardoned in a disappointed statesman. A man kicked out of court, under the imputation of having “dealings with the devil,” but played trick for trick when he put the lash into the hand of St. Peter. Dunstan had his eye upon an eminence, and was resolved to attain it. Usurers and misers sometimes fix their thoughts upon a given sum, which they resolve to obtain, and then become honest. Human nature a little warped was the same nine hundred years ago as now. We are drawing the character of one who was then a living and moving man, subject to human infirmities, for in his alleged saint-ship we have no belief whatever, though Dunstan himself might aspire to the title, and with a brain at times diseased, try at last to find that sanctity within himself which others attributed to him, even as a healthy man with a yellowish look discovers, through the allusions of his friends, that he has got the jaundice, although his countenance has only been exposed to the sun.

* Turner's "Anglo-Saxons," vol. 2, p. 248. Although we differ from this honest and able historian in many of the inferences he has drawn from undisputed facts, we believe no writer ever sat down with a firmer determination to do justice to the memory of the dead than Sharon Turner.

In miracles, the hand of God is manifested; when the dead are raised, and the blind suddenly restored to sight, we question not the Almighty power; but we doubt St. Peter lacerating the back of Dunstan, and even acquit the latter of so merry a joke, as that which was invented about his taking the devil by the nose with his red hot tongs, and alarming all the neighbourhood by his bellowings. If "possibility" is dragged into the argument, we must remain silent, for no one is impious enough to limit the power of the Deity. Where it would evince a want of faith to doubt the holiness of the apostles, it would be no sin to hesitate before we pronounced Dunstan, or Thomas-à-Becket, or Peter the Hermit, saints. What a simple-minded peasant would devoutly believe to be the truth in the present day, an intelligent person would be scarcely tolerated in enlightened society for asserting,—and by such homely facts as these are the truths of history only to be tested.

The first act which brings Dunstan so prominently forward in the reign of Edwin is his rude attack upon the king on the day of his coronation. Edwin had retired early from the banquet-hall, to seek the society of his beautiful wife Elgiva, in her own apartment, when his absence was remarked by the assembled guests. Odo, the Danish archbishop, was present at the coronation feast, and perceiving that the retirement of the king displeased the company, commanded those persons who were attendant upon him to fetch Edwin back. After some demur by the party whom Odo addressed, Dunstan and another bishop, his relation, undertook to bring back the king. Elgiva's mother was in the chamber with Edwin and her daughter when the two bishops entered, rudely, and unannounced. Edwin, it appears, at the moment of their entrance, was in one of his merry moods, and doubtless glad that he had escaped from the drunken revels of a Saxon feast, had taken off his crown and placed it on the ground, and was engaged in a playful struggle with his queen, when the bishops broke so rudely upon his retirement; or it is very probable that the crown had fallen off his head while toying with her, and that seeing the emblem of sovereignty thus cast aside like a bauble, may for a moment have chafed the temper of the irritable and decorous Dunstan. We could see nothing to condemn on the part of the bishop, if he had respectfully solicited the return of the king to the banquet; but when Edwin refused to go, and Dunstan dragged him rudely from his



Dunstan dragging King Edwy from Elgiva.

seat, and forced the crown again upon his head, the latter far outstepped his commission, and acted more like a traitor than a loyal subject in thus attempting to coerce the king. It would, in those days, have been held a justifiable act on the part of Edwin to have laid the haughty prelate dead at his feet. Elgiva, with the spirit of a true woman, upbraided the bishop for his insolence, and Dunstan, we fear, made use of such epithets as belonged more to the smithy than the sanctum; and in which he alluded to the painted lady who is described in the Old Testament as having been thrown out of her window, and devoured by dogs. Nor should we think that the man who had the boldness to attempt to drag out the king by force, would hesitate to throw out a gentle hint, that, if opposed, he would adopt the same method of silencing her as that which was used in stilling the tongue of a "king's daughter." To account for this palace brawl, we must conclude that the Danish prelate and the Saxon bishop had pledged each other to such a depth in their cups as perilled their reason, or, in other words, there is but little doubt, the reputed saint was the worse for the wine-cup. Edwin's first act was, however, sufficient to restore him again to his senses, and although he was the friend of Turketul, the chancellor, and stood high in the estimation of Odo, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the young king deprived Dunstan of all the offices he held, confiscated his wealth, and sentenced him to banishment.

Here we behold Dunstan once more driven from court, and he no longer carries our sympathies with him, as before-time. A private gentleman, much less a king, could not calmly have brooked the insult Dunstan offered to his sovereign. Ten thousand men might be found in the present day, who would have rebuked the proudest bishop that ever wore a mitre, had he but dared to intrude thus upon their privacy. We have before stated that Elgiva was somewhat closely related to her husband, though it is pretty clear that this kinship extended not nearer than to that of cousin. Such as it was, however, the savage Odo made it a plea for divorce, and separated the king from his wife. Not contented with this, the bloody-minded and cruel archbishop sent a party of savage soldiers to seize her—to drag her like a criminal from her own palace, and, oh! horrible to relate, to brand that beautiful face, which only to look on was to love, with red hot iron—the lips and cheeks which the young king had so proudly hung over and doted upon, were,

by the command of the cursed Odo, burnt by the hands of ruffianly soldiers—by the order of this miscalled man of God—yet the lightning of Heaven descended not to drive his mitre molten into his brain. Oh, what heart-rending shrieks must that beautiful woman have sent forth!—what inhuman monsters must they have been who held her white wrists, as she writhed in convulsive agony. Death, indeed, would have been mercy compared to such bloody barbarism; after this, she was banished, in all her agony, to Ireland.

Time, that, like sleep, is the great soother of so many sorrows, healed the wounds which the hard-hearted Odo had caused to be inflicted on the youthful queen, and her surpassing beauty once more broke forth, and erased the burning scars with which it had been disfigured,—like a rose, that, in its full-blown loveliness, leaves no trace of the blight that had settled down upon the bud. With a heart, yearning all the more fondly for her youthful husband, through the sufferings, which had been embittered by his absence, she rushed, on the eager wings of love, to pour her sorrows into his bosom, and to pillow her beautiful head on that heart which had known no rest since their cruel separation; but the demons of destruction were again let loose upon her. She was pursued and overtaken before she had reached those arms which were open to receive her, and so dreadfully was the body of that lovely lady mangled, that the blood rolls back chilly into the heart, while we sit and sigh over her sufferings. We will not pain our readers by describing this unparalleled butchery. But Odo reaped his reward. “Vengeance is mine,” saith the Lord; and before His unerring tribunal the spirit of the mitred murderer, centuries ago, trembled.

From the hour of Elgiva’s murder, the spirit of Edwin drooped. He seems to have sat like a shadow with the sceptre in his hand, “nerveless, listless, dead.” His subjects rebelled against him. Dunstan was recalled from banishment, and new honours were heaped upon his head. Edwin’s kingdom was divided, and though his brother Edgar was not more than thirteen years of age, the dominions of Northumbria and Mercia were placed under his sway. The infamous Odo, and his emissaries, were at last triumphant; and there is scarcely a doubt but that, a few years after the death of his wife, Edwin himself was murdered in Gloucestershire. In several old chronicles it is darkly hinted

that he met with a violent death: in one, which is still extant in the Cotton Library, it is clearly asserted that he was slain.

A youthful king, on whose head the crown, with all its cares and heart-aches, was placed at the age of sixteen, was but ill-armed to battle with the hoary-headed, cunning, and grey iniquity which surrounded his throne. He, who would cast his crown upon the ground to toy with his beautiful wife, was no match for that hypocrisy which was hidden beneath the folds of a saintly garb. When, with a spirit far beyond his years, he boldly resented the insult that Dunstan had offered to him, the whole power of the court was at once arrayed against him, for Dunstan was already venerated by the ignorant people as a saint: he had the chancellor and the primate on his side; and few would be found to make head against a cause on the part of which such powerful authorities were arranged as leaders. The respect which was due to a king must have been greatly lessened by the insult which Dunstan had offered to his sovereign. It resembled more the conduct of a schoolmaster towards an unruly pupil than that of a subject to his superior. Edwin closed his troublous career about the year 959; and by his death Edgar, who had for three years ruled over the northern dominions, became king of England.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REIGN OF EDGAR.

“The royal letters are a thing of course;
A king, that would, might recommend his horse,
And deans, no doubt, and chapters with one voice,
As bound in duty, would confirm the choice.
Behold your bishop! well he plays his part,
Christian in name, and infidel in heart.”—COWPER.

OVER the reign of Edgar, who ascended the throne in his sixteenth year, the shadow of Dunstan again falls, and those who had rent the kingdom asunder, and placed him, when a mere boy, upon the throne of Mercia, kept a more tenacious hold of the crown as its circle widened, and gathered closer round

Edgar as they saw his power increased. Dunstan had by this time risen to the dignity of bishop of London. The infamous Odo had died about the close of the reign of Edwin, and, weakened as the power of that unfortunate king was, he had spirit enough to appoint another to the primacy of England. The bishop that Edwin had nominated perished in the snow while crossing the Alps; for the pontiffs had issued a decree that no one should be established in the dignity of archbishop till he had first visited Rome, and received the pallium; which, as we have before described, was a tippet made of the whitest and purest of lamb's wool, chequered with purple crosses, and worn over the shoulders. Another bishop was appointed in his place, but he was soon compelled to resign the primacy, the objections raised against him being, that he was modest, humble, and of a gentle temper—virtues which, although they form the very basis of the Christian character, but ill accorded with the views of the ambitious churchmen who now surrounded the throne of the young king. In 960, only a year after the accession of Edgar, Dunstan, although he held the sees of Winchester, Worcester, Rochester, and London, was appointed archbishop of Canterbury, and received the pallium from the hand of Pope John the Twelfth, at Rome. Dunstan lost no time in promoting the interests of those who had assisted in raising him to his new dignity. He appointed Oswald, a relation of Odo, to the bishopric of Worcester; and Ethelwold, with whom he had been educated in his early years, he made bishop of Winchester. They also, by the intercession of Dunstan, became the king's councillors. By this means, he had ever those who were his sworn friends and servants at the elbow of the sovereign. That he contributed to the spreading of education and to the encouragement of the fine arts will ever redound to the credit of Dunstan; while the supernatural gifts to which he laid claim—the vision of his mother's marriage with the Saviour—the song which, he said, the angel taught him, and with which he roused every monk in the monastery, at morning light, to learn—we must, in charity, attribute to that temporary insanity to which he was at times subject, and which did not even pass unnoticed by his contemporaries.

Nearly the first act of the primate appears to have been the establishment of the Benedictine rules in the monasteries; for the severe and rigid tenets which were adhered to by this new

order of monks appear to have suited the cold, stony nature of the new archbishop, the warm emotions of whose heart had now died out, and faded into that cold, ashy grey, which, having lost all sympathy with the living and breathing world, lies as if dead and in a grave, while the heartless body still lives and acts.

Sorry we are that Edgar so implicated himself with the views of the ambitious primate, that whatever Dunstan planned, the king executed, and in every way favoured the new order of monks. The following may be taken as a sample of Edgar's eloquence in favour of the Benedictine order; it was delivered at a public synod, over which the king presided. After condemning the secular clergy for the smallness of their tonsure, in which the least possible patch of baldness was displayed, and finding fault with them for mixing with the laity, and living with concubines, for that was the new name by which Dunstan now designated the wives of the clergy, he addressed the primate as follows: "It is you, Dunstan, by whose advice I founded monasteries, built churches, and expended my treasure in the support of religion and religious houses. You were my councillor and assistant in all my schemes; you were the director of my conscience; to you I was obedient in all things. When did you call for supplies which I refused you? Was my assistance ever wanting to the poor? Did I deny support and establishments to the clergy or the convents? Did I not hearken to your instructions, who told me that these charities were of all others the most grateful to my Maker, and fixed a perpetual fund for the support of religion? And are all our pious endeavours now frustrated by the dissolute lives of the priests? Not that I throw any blame on you; you have reasoned, besought, inculcated, inveighed: but it now behoves you to use sharper and more vigorous remedies, and, conjoining your spiritual authority with the civil power, to purge effectually the temple of God from thieves and intruders."

Although Edgar was such an unflinching advocate of celibacy, and is said to have made married priests so scarce, that it was a rarity to see the face of one about his court, he appears to have fixed no limits to his own vicious propensities. While his first queen was yet surviving, he carried off a beautiful young lady, of noble birth, named Wulfreda, from the nunnery of Wilton, where she was receiving her education, under the sanctity of the veil. This, however, was no protection for her person; but Dunstan

had the courage to step in, and inflict a penance upon the royal ravisher; which was, to fast occasionally; to lay aside his crown for seven years; to pay a fine to the nunnery; and, as if to make all in keeping with the action, for which he was thus mulct, he was to expel all the married clergy, and fill up their places with monks. Such was the penalty imposed upon him by Dunstan, who, himself disappointed in love in his earlier years, was now the sworn enemy of all married priests. Whether such edicts as he promulgated; and rigidly enforced, were calculated to check or increase such infamous acts as the above, there can scarcely remain matter of doubt; but how many Wulfredas the enforcing of his unnatural laws of celibacy were the means of violating can never now be known.

Edgar having heard rumours of the beauty of Elfrida, who was the daughter of Ordgar, earl of Devonshire, despatched one of his noblemen, named Athelwold, on some feigned business, to the castle of her father, to see if her features bore out the report he had heard of her beauty. Athelwold saw her, was suddenly smitten with her charms, and keeping the mission he was sent upon a secret, offered her his hand, was accepted, and married her. Though Athelwold had reported unfavourably of her beauty, and, through this misrepresentation, obtained Edgar's consent to marry her, influenced, as he said, by her immense wealth, the truth was not long before it reached the ears of Edgar, who resolved upon paying her a visit himself. The king's will was law; and all Athelwold could now do was to entreat of Edgar to allow him to precede him, pleading, as an excuse for his request, that he might put his house in order for the reception of his royal guest. His real object, however, was to gain time, and to persuade his wife to disguise her beauty by wearing homely attire, or to suffer another to personate her until the king's departure. But Elfrida, who, like Drida of old, concealed, under the form of an angel, the evil passions of a fiend, rebuked her husband sternly for having stepped in, and prevented her from ascending the throne, and for having himself snatched up that beauty which might have raised her to the rank of queen. All, however, was not yet lost; and never before had Elfrida bestowed such pains in decorating her person as she did on the day of the king's arrival. She was resolved upon captivating him; and as nature had done so much, she called in the charms of art to give a finish to her unequalled beauty. We can almost

fancy poor Athelwold fidgeting about the turret-stair, and thinking every minute which she spent over her toilet an hour; and what a hopeless look the poor Saxon nobleman must have given, as, startled by the trumpets which announced the coming of the king, she rose from her seat with a proud step, and a kindling eye, glancing contemptuously upon her husband as she passed, and hurrying eagerly to the gate, to be foremost in welcoming the sovereign. The king was charmed; Athelwold was found murdered in a neighbouring wood; Edgar married Elfrida, and her name is another of those foul stains which disfigure the page of history. There is no proof that Edgar stabbed Athelwold with his own hand; on the contrary, there was a natural bravery about the king, more in keeping with the chivalric age than the barbarous times in which he lived. To cite a proof of his valour: it had been reported to him that Kenneth of Scotland, who was then on a visit at the English court, had one day said that it was a wonder to him so many provinces should obey a man so little; for Edgar was not only small in stature, but very thin. The Saxon king never named the matter to his guest, until one day when they were riding out together, in a lonely wood, when Edgar produced two swords, and handing one to the Scottish sovereign, said, "Our arms shall decide which ought to obey the other; for it will be base to have asserted that at a feast which you cannot maintain with your sword." Kenneth recalled his ill-timed remark, apologized, and was forgiven. Such a man would scarcely stoop to so base an act as assassination.

None of the Saxon kings had ever evinced such a love of pomp and display as Edgar. He summoned all the sovereigns to do homage for the kingdoms they held under him, at Chester; and, not content with this acknowledged vassalage, he commanded his barge to be placed in readiness on the river; and, seating himself at the helm, was rowed down the Dee by the eight tributary kings who were his guests. But with all his pride he was generous; and to Kenneth of Scotland, who had thus condescended to become one of his royal bargemen, he gave the whole wide county of Louth, together with a hundred ounces of the purest gold, and many costly rings, ornaments, and precious stones, beside several valuable dresses of the richest silk; only exacting in return that Kenneth should, once a year, attend his principal feast. Every spring he rode in rich array through

his kingdom, accompanied by Dunstan and the nobles of his court, when he examined into the conduct of the rulers he had appointed over the provinces, and rigorously enforced obedience to the laws. He gave great encouragement to foreign artificers, regardless from what country they came; if they but evinced superior skill in workmanship, it was a sure passport to the patronage of Edgar. The tax which Athelstan imposed upon the Welsh, after he had won the battle of Brunanburg, Edgar commuted into an annual tribute of three hundred wolves' heads; and, by such a wise measure, the kingdom was so thinned of this formidable animal, that on the fourth year a sufficient number could not be found to make up the tribute. Three centuries after, and in the reign of Edward the First, we find England again so infested with wolves, that a royal mandate was issued to effect their extinction in the counties of Gloucester, Worcester, Hereford, and Stafford, and that in other places great rewards were also given for their destruction. Our Saxon ancestors called January Wolf-month, "because," says an old chronicle, "people are wont always in that moneth to be more in danger to be devoured of wolves than in any season els of the yere, for that through the extremity of cold and snow, those ravenous creatures could not find of other beasts sufficient to feed upon." The terror with which the wolf was regarded by our forefathers, doubtless caused many of the Saxon kings and leaders to assume the name of an animal which was so formidable for its courage and ferocity. Thus we find such names as Æthelwulf, the noble wolf; Berhtwulf, the illustrious wolf; Wulfric, powerful as a wolf; Eardwulf, the wolf of the province; Wulfheah, the tall wolf; Sigwulf, the victorious wolf; and Ealdwulf, the old wolf. So infested were the "cars" of Lincolnshire, and the wolds of Yorkshire, with wolves, which were wont to breed, in what are now the marshlands beside the Trent, amongst the sedge and rushes, that the shepherds were compelled to drive their flocks at night for safety into the towns and villages. And in the time of Athelstan, a retreat was built in the forest of Flixton, in Yorkshire, for passengers to shelter in, and defend themselves from the attacks of wolves.

Edgar died in the year 975, at the age of thirty-two. By his first wife he had a son named Edward, who succeeded him; also a daughter who ended her life in a nunnery. By Elfrida,



The Welch tribute of Wolves Heads.

the widow of the murdered Athelwold, he had two sons, Edmund, who died young, and Ethelred, who in his turn obtained the crown by the murder which Elfrida caused to be committed.

Elfric, who lived a few years after the death of Edgar, has left the following highly-coloured testimonial in praise of his character: "Of all the kings of the English nation, he was the most powerful. And it was the Divine will that his enemies, both kings and earls, who came to him desiring peace, should, without any battle, be subjected to him to do what he willed. Hence he was honoured over a wide extent of land." This panegyric, we think, is somewhat overdrawn: it is true that he kept up a large fleet, consisting of twelve hundred ships, which he stationed on different points of the coast—that he punished those who plundered the vessels of his merchants—executed the law rigorously on the coiners of false money, and left England as free from robbers as it had been at the close of the reign of Alfred. Still, with all his high-sounding titles, which in some of his charters run to the length of eighteen lines; he rivets not the eye, nor interests the heart, like many of his predecessors who grace the great gallery of our early Saxon kings.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EDWARD THE MARTYR.

"For saints may do the same things by
The Spirit, in sincerity,
Which other men are tempted to,
And at the devil's instance do."—BUTLER'S *Hudibras*.

"The tyrannous and bloody act is done;
The most arch deed of piteous massacre
That ever yet this land was guilty of."—SHAKSPERE.

EDWARD, called the Martyr, was a mere boy of fifteen when he ascended the throne, which was vacated by the death of his father, Edgar. As he had been schooled under Dunstan, and his mind moulded to suit the purposes of the ambitious primate, he was chosen, in opposition to the wishes of Elfrida, who boldly

came forward and claimed the crown for her son Ethelred, then a child only six years old. This aspiring queen was not without her adherents; and as the rigorous measures to which Dunstan had resorted, to coerce the married clergy and exclude them from officiating in the churches, had rendered him unpopular in many quarters, numbers were found ready to rally round Elfrida and her son Ethelred. But Edward had been appointed king by the will of his father, and the charge against his legitimacy appears to have been altogether unfounded; for he was the undoubted son of Edgar, and the fruit of his first marriage with Elfreda, who was called "the Fair;" and Dunstan adopted the readiest method of settling the dispute by assembling the bishops, and such of the nobles as were favourable to his cause, then placing the crown at once upon his head.

Meantime, the contest continued to be waged more keenly between the monks and the secular clergy. Dunstan had opposed the coronation of Ethelred; and Elfrida, who was as bold as she was cruel, rose up, and took the part of the married priests. Elfrede, the governor of Mercia, also set the primate at defiance, emptied all the monasteries in his province of the Benedictine monks, and levelled many of their buildings to the ground—a strong proof that the power of the archbishop was on the wane. Alwin, the governor of East Anglia, took the side of Dunstan; gave shelter to the monks who had been driven out of Mercia; and chased the married priests from the province over which he ruled. Beside Mercia, the secular clergy had obtained possession of many monasteries; and to end these disputes, Dunstan convened a synod at Winchester. Here a voice is said to have issued from the crucifix which was fixed in the wall, which forbade all change; and instead of arguing the matter fairly, Dunstan at once exclaimed—"A divine voice has determined the affair; what wish ye more?" This artifice, however, did not succeed; for there were then, as now, men who had great misgivings about Dunstan's miracles, and who believed that he would not hesitate to avail himself of any means he could impress, to carry out his object. Dunstan, seeing the mistrust and doubt with which his pretended miracle was received, resolved that, if they did not accede to his wishes, his next attempt at the marvellous should be accompanied with proof of his vengeance.

It was in the year 978 that this second or third council was held at Calne. It was, as before, a Saxon parliament, or witen-a-

gemot, consisting of the nobles and principal clergy of the nation. The opponents of Dunstan appear to have grown hot in argument, and, according to one of our ancient historians, William of Malmesbury, "the matter was agitated with great warmth of controversy, and the darts of many reproaches were thrown on Dunstan, but could not shake him." The following reply of the primate to the attack made upon him is given from Osberne, who was the friend and councillor of the archbishop Langfranc, a man who held Dunstan in the highest estimation. Osberne was alive about a century after the event took place which he records. After having defended himself for some time, Dunstan concluded with these remarkable words: 'Since you did not, in such a lapse of time, bring forward your accusation, but, now that I am old and cultivating taciturnity, seek to disturb me by these antiquated complaints, *I confess that I am unwilling that you should conquer me.* I commit the cause of his church to Christ as the Judge.' He spoke, and the wrath of the angry Deity corroborated what he said; for the house was immediately shaken; the chamber was loosened under their feet; his enemies were precipitated to the ground, and oppressed by the weight of the crushing timbers. BUT WHERE THE SAINT WAS RECLINING WITH HIS FRIENDS, THERE NO RUIN OCCURRED."

Eadmar, who was contemporary with Osberne, expresses himself still more clearly, though he appears not for a moment to have suspected that the villanous affair was arranged by Dunstan and his confidential friends. "He spoke, and, lo! the floor under the feet of *those who had come together against him fell from beneath them*, and all were alike precipitated; but where *Dunstan stood with his friends*, no ruin of the house, no accident happened." The Saxon chronicle, an authentic record of that period, also notices the falling in of the floor, and the escape of Dunstan. As this is the greatest blot on his character, we have been careful in producing such undisputed authorities. To attribute the catastrophe to an accident, would be reasonable, had only Dunstan himself escaped; but when we look at the conclusion of the speech which is attributed to him by those who admired his character—"I confess that I am unwilling you should conquer"—and see it recorded that all his friends were uninjured, we are surely justified in concluding that the floor had been previously undermined, and that all was so arranged that, at a given signal, the only remaining prop was removed, and

Dunstan and his friends were left secure to glut their gaze on their slain and wounded enemies; for many of the nobles on whom the beams and rafters fell were killed upon the spot. That the crime rested with Dunstan alone, we cannot believe—many must have been cognisant of it; the strength of the council was against the primate, and but for this accident, miracle, or, as we believe, carefully-planned scheme of villany, Dunstan's power would at once have ended; as it was, to quote the words of the old chronicler, "this miracle gave peace to the archbishop." When his friend Athelwold died, and the see of Winchester was vacant, Dunstan wished to appoint his friend Elphegus to the bishopric; but meeting with some opposition amongst the nobles, he boldly asserted that St. Andrew had appeared to him, and commanded him to appoint his friend to the vacant see. Here we have another proof of the use which Dunstan made of the sanctity that was attributed to his character. The miracles which are ascribed to him—his combats with the devil, who was constantly appearing to him in every imaginable shape, such as that of a bear, a dog, a viper, and a wolf, may be found fully recorded in the ancient life, written by Bridfirth, who was personally acquainted with Dunstan.* We have dwelt thus lengthily on the life of this singular and ambitious man, as in it we see fully illustrated the evil consequence of persecuting and retarding the progress of superior talent. It is probable that no one ever set out in the world with a firmer determination of acting honestly and uprightly than Dunstan; it is also clear, that in intellectual attainments he ranked amongst the highest which that age produced; nor do we think that we should be much in error in assuming that when, in his old age, he looked back, through the dim vista of years, to the bright and promising morning of his life, he often sighed for that retirement which he might have enjoyed in the society of her whom his heart first clung to; nor can we marvel if the crimes which are attributed to him are true, which is strongly supported by the evidence we have produced, that in his old age his slumber was often broken by such fearful apparitions—the creation of a guilty conscience, as his friend and biographer Bridfirth has stated were ever present before his diseased imagination.

* At page 277 of Turner's "Anglo-Saxons," vol. ii., is the commencement of a long and valuable note on the ancient lives of St. Dunstan, which are still extant.

Dunstan still stood high in the favour of his youthful sovereign, and the primate shielded him, for a time, from the vengeance of Elfrida, who aimed at placing the crown upon the head of her son Ethelred; to accomplish this, a conspiracy had been formed to assassinate Edward, in which the governor of Mercia, who had driven out the clergy, is said to have leagued himself with the queen-dowager; for party-feeling still raged as strongly on the sides of the monks and the secular clergy as ever; and aged as Dunstan was, there yet remained many enemies, who anxiously sought his overthrow; but the nobles continued to remain true to their king, and, while they surrounded him, he was safe from the meditated blow.

The long looked for hour came at last. Edward was out, one day, hunting near Wareham, in Dorsetshire, when, either having outridden his attendants, or purposely resolved to visit his mother-in-law, he rode up to Corfe Castle, where she resided with her son Ethelred, and without alighting from his horse, had a brief interview with Elfrida, at the gate. She received him with an assumed kindness, and urgently pressed him to dismount. This he declined doing, and having requested to see his brother Ethelred, he called for a cup of wine, which was brought, when, just as he had raised it to his lips, one of Elfrida's attendants stepped behind him, and stabbed him in the back. Dropping the cup from his hand, he struck the spurs into his horse, and fled; for we can readily imagine that one glance at the countenance of Elfrida satisfied the wounded monarch that she was the instigator of the murderous deed. With no one near to follow or support him, he soon fainted through loss of blood, and fell from his saddle; the affrighted steed still plunged onward, with headlong speed, dragging the body of the king along, over the rugged road, as he still hung with his foot suspended in the stirrup. When discovered by his attendants, he was dead—his course was traced by the beaten ground over which his mangled body had passed, and the blood that had stained the bladed grass, and left its crimson trail upon the knotted stems against which it had struck. His remains were burnt, and there is some doubt whether even his ashes were preserved for interment. "No worse deed," says the Saxon chronicle, "had been committed among the people of the Anglo-Saxons since they first came to the land of Britain." Edward was not more than eighteen years of age when he was murdered.

His death, however, was not the first that Elfrida had caused. In the records of Ely, mention is made of an abbot named Brythonod, who attracted her attention as he came to the palace on matters connected with his abbey. As he was about to take his departure, Elfrida requested to speak with him apart, under the plea of unburthening her conscience. What passed at this private interview would probably never have been known, but through her own confession, when she became a penitent, and acknowledged her guilt. She made such proposals to the abbot as he was unwilling to concede to. Her fondness soon changed to revenge, and shortly after the virtuous abbot was assassinated. Such was the woman who comes heaving up, like a blood-stained shadow, into the next reign, and whose evil influence brought such woe upon England. It is said that Ethelred wept bitterly at the death of his brother Edward, whom he dearly loved, and that his mother seized either a torch or a thick wax candle, and beat the young prince with it until he was senseless. So unpopular were Elfrida and her son, that an attempt was made to raise an illegitimate daughter of Edgar to the throne. The young lady was the daughter of Wulfreda, whom he had violently carried from the nunnery of Wilton. The plot failed, and Ethelred succeeded to the crown, in 978, and in the tenth year of his age.

CHAPTER XXX.

ETHELRED THE UNREADY.

“And when they talk of him, they shake their heads,
And whisper one another in the ear;
And he that speaks, doth gripe the hearer’s wrist;
While he that hears, makes fearful action,
With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.”
SHAKSPERE.

THE ambitious hopes of Elfrida were justly doomed to meet with disappointment: the power she sought to obtain by the assassination of Edward eluded her grasp, and Dunstan, though aged and infirm, still stood at the head of his party, triumphant.

The Saxons looked with disgust upon a woman who had caused her son-in-law to be stabbed at her own castle-gate; and there is but little doubt that the primate, for a time, so successfully raised the popular indignation against her, that she was compelled to seek shelter in a nunnery until the storm subsided. On the head of the son of the murderess, the primate placed the crown, in 978; and it is recorded that, instead of pronouncing a blessing upon it, the stern churchman gave utterance to a bitter malediction, foreboding that a reign which was begun with bloodshed and murder, could only end in sorrow, suffering, and dishonourable humiliation. Ethelred possessed not those qualities which, by their sterling worth, weigh down all unpopular opinion; where the darkness had once settled, it remained; for he illuminated it not by the brilliant achievement of glorious deeds. In the eyes of the Saxon nation the blood of Alfred was at last contaminated; the wisdom which had so long governed England peaceably, had waned away; and the arm which had struck terror into the hearts of five nations on the field of Brunanburg, was now weak and powerless; for the throne of England was at last occupied by the child of a murderess, whom Dunstan, from his apparent apathy, had already nick-named "The Unready."

England had long been rent asunder by civil dissensions, which the accession of Ethelred only tended to increase instead of assuaging: the sceptre had before-time fallen into young and helpless hands without diminishing the kingdom's strength, but there were then none of those private heart-burnings to contend against; none of that party bitterness which divided family against family, for the state was supported by the united strength of its nobles, and its councils swayed by a feeling of union and harmony. It was not the monks and the secular clergy that this long contention alone affected; almost every town and village was divided against itself, for the quarrel extended to the domestic hearth. Dunstan could not drive a married priest from the church without making enemies of the whole family: there was the insulted wife as well as the husband to appease; then came a wide circle of relations and friends, while, on the part of the monks, no such extensive ramifications were arrayed. Thousands were therefore found ready to overthrow a government which was headed by the primate.

Such internal dissensions as these could not pass unnoticed by the Danes, who were ever on the alert to shake off the Saxon yoke when an opportunity presented itself; and rumours of the discords which reigned in England were soon blown over the Baltic; and many an anxious eye began to look out over the sea for succour; for the northmen had long pined for a king of their own nation to reign over the territory which they occupied in England. Dunstan, who had lent his powerful aid in supporting the sceptre throughout three reigns, had, by this time, grown old, and feeble, and helpless; Elfrida had weakened the power she once possessed, by the very means she took to strengthen it; and two years after the accession of Ethelred, Danish ships again began to appear, and pour out their pirates to ravage as of old, and spread terror along the English coasts, for the tidings soon reached the rocky shores of Norway, that there was no longer the wisdom of an Alfred to guide the government, nor the arm of an Athelstan to protect the English throne. While, to add to this state of disunion and broken government, it is believed many of the influential Saxons were in league with the Danes, and covertly encouraged the new invaders.

Passing over the minor invasions, which first consisted of seven ships, and then of three, and of the trifling engagements which succeeded, and in which the Saxons were at one time defeated, and at another victorious, we shall commence with the first formidable force, which was commanded by Justin and Gurthmund, and which was opposed by a strong Saxon force, headed by Byrhtnoth, the governor of Essex. The sea-kings first sent a herald to the Saxon court, demanding tribute; the Saxon nobleman raised his buckler, and, looking sternly at the messenger while he shook his javelin in his face, exclaimed—"Herald of the men of the ocean, hear from my lips the answer of this people to thy message. Instead of tribute, they will bestow on you their weapons, the edge of their spears, their ancient swords, and the weight of their arms. Hear me, mariner, and carry back my message of high indignation in return. Say, that a Saxon earl, with his retainers, here stands undaunted; that he will defend unto death this land, the domain of my sovereign, Ethelred, his people, and his territory. Tell the Vikings that I shall think it but dastardly if they retire to their ships with the booty, without joining in battle,

since they have advanced thus far into our land." A river divided the hostile forces, and the Saxon earl allowed the invaders a free passage across it unmolested, before the battle commenced. One of the sea-kings fell early in the conflict; Bryhtnoth selected the other for his opponent, and the bold Vikingr accepted the challenge. The first javelin which the sea-king hurled, slightly wounded the Saxon leader; Bryhtnoth then struck the sea-king with his spear, but the Dane "so manœuvred with his shield, that the shaft broke, and the spear sprang back and recoiled." The next blow struck by the Saxon earl pierced the ringed chains of the sea-king's armour, and the pointed weapon stuck in his heart. The Dane had no sooner fallen, than the Saxon was struck by a dart: a youth, named Wulfmor, "a boy in the field," who appears to have been the earl's page, or armour-bearer, with his own hand drew out the javelin which had transfixed the body of Bryhtnoth, and hurled it back at the Dane who had just launched it, with such force, and so sure an aim, that it struck him, and he fell dead. The Saxon earl was already staggering through loss of blood, when one of the pirates approached him, with the intent of plundering him of "his gems, his vestment, his ring, and his ornamental sword." But Bryhtnoth had still strength enough left to uplift his heavy battle-axe, "broad and brown of edge," and to strike such a blow on the corslet of the Dane, that it compelled him to loose his hold. After this he fell, covered with wounds, but uttering his commands to the last moment. Although the battle was continued for some time after his death, the Saxons were defeated.

Turn we now to Ethelred. While here and there a Saxon chief was found bold enough to make head, like Bryhtnoth, against the invaders, the dastardly sovereign assembled his witena-gemot, to consult as to what amount of tribute should be paid to the invaders, to induce them to abandon the island. Siric, the successor of Dunstan, is said to have been the first who proposed this cowardly measure. Had the old primate been alive, with all his faults, he would have seen England drenched with Saxon blood, and been foremost in the ranks to have spilt his own, ere he would have seen his country degraded by such an unmanly concession. Ten thousand pounds was the disgraceful grant paid to purchase a temporary peace with the Danes. The invaders received their money, departed,

and speedily returned with a greater force to demand a larger sum. The northmen found no lack of allies in a land where their countrymen had so long been located, who, shaking off their allegiance to England, flew eagerly to arms, and joined the new-comers.

But the old Saxon spirit was not yet wholly extinct. There was still remaining amongst the nobles a few who were resolved not to be plundered with impunity. With great effort they at last succeeded in arousing the lethargic king; and by his command, a few strong ships were built at London, and filled with chosen soldiers; and to Alfric, the governor of Mercia, was entrusted the guidance of the Saxon fleet. His first orders were to sail round the southern coast, and to attack the Danes at some particular port, in which they could easily be surrounded. A duke and two bishops were also joined with him in the command. Alfric turned traitor, communicated to the Danes the meditated mode of attack, then carried with him what force he could in the night, and secretly joined the invaders. The rest of the fleet remained true to their unworthy king, and honestly executed their duty; although, through the frustration of their able plans, they found the Danish ships in full flight, and at first were only able to capture one of the enemy's yessels. But that courage and perseverance which have so long distinguished the English navy, were, even in this early age, frequently evinced; and before the Danish ships were able to regain a safe harbour, many of them were captured by the Saxons, and, amongst the rest, were those which the traitor Alfric had carried over to the enemy; he, however, contrived to escape; and Ethelred,—who had been trained in the barbarous school of Elfrida,—to avenge the crimes committed by Alfric, ordered the eyes of his son, Algar, to be put out. The next attack was made upon Lincolnshire, but the command of the Saxons was again entrusted to three chiefs of Danish origin, who appear to have crossed over, and joined their countrymen at the commencement of the battle.

It was in the spring of 994 that a formidable fleet entered the Thames, consisting of nearly a hundred ships, and commanded by Olaf, king of Norway, and Swein, king of Denmark. On first landing, they took formal possession of England, according to an ancient custom of their country, by first planting one lance upon the shore, and throwing another into the river

they had crossed. Although some resistance was offered, and they were compelled to abandon their original plan of plundering London, they were enabled to over-run Essex and Kent; and satisfied with the plunder they obtained in these counties, they next turned their arms successfully against Sussex and Hampshire, and in none of these places did they meet with opposition of sufficient importance to draw forth a word of comment from the ancient chroniclers—a strong proof of the disaffection that must have reigned amongst the Saxons, and of the unpopularity of Ethelred's government.

Instead of arming in the defence of his kingdom, Ethelred again had recourse to his exchequer, and despatched messengers to know the terms the Danes demanded for a cessation of hostilities. Sixteen thousand pounds (though some of our early historians have named a much larger sum) was the price the northern kings now claimed for the purchase of peace. It was paid; and the king of Norway, after having received hostages for his safety, paid a visit to the Saxon court. While he was Ethelred's guest he was baptized, and, as it appears, not for the first time, for the sea-kings cared but little for changing their creed, when rich presents accompanied the persuasions of the Christian bishops. But whether Olaf departed a pagan or a Christian, he solemnly promised never more to invade England, and religiously kept his word.

After the lapse of about three years, Swein, king of Denmark, again resumed his hostilities. Wessex, Wales, Cornwall, and Devonshire, were this time ravaged. The monastery of Tavistock was destroyed, and although laden with plunder, so little dread had the Danes of the Saxons that they boldly took up their quarters for the winter in the island. It is true they were not allowed to carry on their work of destruction without molestation; but no sooner was an attack planned and a battle arranged, than either treason or accident overthrew or checked the operation. A spirit of disaffection reigned amongst the people. That earnestness of purpose, and determined valour, which had hitherto so strongly marked the Saxon character seemed all but to have died out. As for Ethelred, though like his mother, handsome in features, and tall of stature, he had neither the abilities to figure in the field nor the cabinet. William of Malmesbury pictured his character in three words, when he called him a "fine sleeping figure." While Swein was engaged

in a war with Olaf of Norway, another army of Danes landed in England, though under what leader has not transpired. At every new invasion the Danes rose in their demands, and this time their forbearance was purchased by the enormous sum of twenty-four thousand pounds.

We now arrive at one of the darkest pages of English history—a massacre which throws into shade the sanguinary slaughter committed by the command of Hengist, at Stonehenge. By what means this vast conspiracy was formed is not clearly stated, although it is on record that letters were sent secretly from the king to every city and town in England, commanding all the Saxon people throughout the British dominions to rise on the same day, and at the same hour, to slaughter the Danes. On the day that ushered in the feast of St. Brice, in the year 1002, this cruel command was executed, though we trust that there is some exaggeration in the accounts given by the ancient chroniclers, which state, that all the Danish families scattered throughout England; husbands, wives, children, down to the smiling infant that pressed the nipple with “its boneless gums,” were, within the space of one brief hour, mercilessly butchered. Even Gunhilda, the sister of Swein, the Danish king, who had married a Saxon earl, and become a Christian, was not saved from the inhuman massacre; and her boy, though the son of a Saxon nobleman, was first slain before her face, ere she herself was beheaded. For nearly five generations had the Danes been settled down in England; yet we fear this dreadful order spared not those whose forefathers had been born on the soil. Through the eye of imagination we look with horror upon such a scene. We picture near neighbours who had lived together for years—who had, when children, played together—who had grown up and intermarried;—we picture the wife rising up against the husband, the father slaying his son-in-law; for neither guest, friend, nor relation appear to have been spared. The insolence, and excess, and brutality of the Danish soldiers formed no excuse for the slaughter of the more peaceable inhabitants who had so long been allowed to occupy the land, and had become naturalized to the soil. Pomp and grandeur, and military array, to a certain extent, disguise the horrors of war, though they lessen not the effect such scenes produce upon a sensitive mind: but here there was nothing to conceal cold-blooded and naked murder

from the open eye of day. But Swein is already at the head of his fleet, riding over the billows, and to him we will now turn, as he stands upon the deck of his vessel, breathing vengeance against the Saxons.

The army which Swein led on is said to have consisted of only the bravest and noblest soldiers. There was not a slave, nor a freed man, nor an old man amongst the number. The ships in which they were embarked rose long and high above the waters, and on the stem of each was engraven the same figure as that which was wrought upon the banner of its commander. The vessel which bore the king of Denmark was called the Great Sea Dragon : it was built in the shape of a serpent, the prow curving, and forming the arched neck and fanged head of the reptile, while over the stern of the ship hung the twisted folds which resembled its tail. On the heads of others were semblances of maned bulls and twined dolphins, and grim figures of armed men, formed of gilt and burnished copper, which flashed back the rays of sunlight, and left trails, like glittering gold, upon the waves. When they landed, they unfurled a mysterious flag of white silk, in the centre of which was embroidered a black raven, with open beak, and outstretched wings, as if in the act of seizing upon its prey. This banner, to secure victory, according to the Scandinavian superstition, had been worked by the hands of Swein's three sisters in one night, while they accompanied the labour with magic songs and wild gestures. Such was the formidable array which, in the spring of 1003, approached the shores of England.

When the Danes landed, they seized upon all the horses they could meet with, and thus formed a strong body of cavalry; they then attacked Exeter, slew many of the inhabitants, and plundered the city. The county of Wilts was next ravaged, and savagely did Swein avenge the murder of his countrymen. Castles and towns were taken in rapid succession, and wherever they passed, they left behind them desolating traces of fire and sword. When they were met by the Saxon army, the leader Alfric feigned illness, and declined the contest; thus, without scarcely a blow having been struck by the English, the Danes ravaged and plundered the country, and slew thousands of the inhabitants; then escaped in safety with the spoil, and regained their ships, leaving behind them a land of mourning, which a grievous famine was now also afflicting.

In the following year, Swein returned to England with his fleet, and destroyed Norwich. Some slight opposition was offered to him by the East Anglians, but it was not sufficient to prevent him from reaching his ships, and escaping, as usual, with the plunder. Turketul, who had an interview with Swein, drew the following vivid picture of the miseries of England at this period. "We possess," said he, "a country illustrious and powerful; a king asleep, solicitous only about women and wine, and trembling at war; hated by his people, and derided by strangers. Generals, envious of each other; and weak governors, ready to fly at the first shout of battle."

In 1006, the Danes again appeared, and this time they received thirty-six thousand pounds to forbear their hostilities. They, however, attacked Canterbury, and made Elfeg, the archbishop, prisoner. He was secured with chains, and removed from one encampment to another; for they believed him to be rich, and were resolved not to part with him, unless he first paid a heavy ransom. The price they fixed upon was three thousand gold pieces. "I have no money of my own," said the archbishop, "and am resolved not to deprive my ecclesiastical territory of a single penny on my account." It was in vain that the Danes urged him, day after day, to raise a ransom. The archbishop was firm, and said, "I will not rob my poor people of that which they have need of for their sustenance." One day, when they had been drinking freely, the primate was brought before the Danish chiefs for pastime, bound, and seated upon a lean, meagre-looking horse. In this pitiable plight, he was led into the centre of the enemy's encampment, in which was placed a huge circle of stones, and on these the sea-kings and their followers were seated. Around them were scattered heaps of bones of oxen, the remains of their rude repast. Some of the chiefs sat with their drinking-horns in their hands, others resting idly with their hands on the hilts of their swords and battle-axes. As soon as the primate appeared in the circle, they raised a loud shout, and exclaimed: "Give us gold, bishop—give us gold! or we will compel thee to play such a game as shall be talked of throughout the whole world." Elfeg calmly answered: "I have but the gold of wisdom to offer you; receive that, and abandon your superstitions, and become converts to the true God." The drunken chiefs, considering this as an insult to their religion, hastily rose up from their mock tribunal, and,

seizing upon the legs and thigh bones of the oxen which they had been devouring, they beat him until he fell prostrate upon the ground. He endeavoured in vain to kneel, and offer up a last prayer, but sank forward, through weakness; when a Danish soldier, whom he had formerly baptized, stepped forward, and dealt him a heavy blow on the skull with his battle-axe, and terminated his sufferings. The body of the murdered bishop was purchased by the Saxons, and carried to London, where it was buried.*

The next method which Ethelred had recourse to, was to lay an oppressive tax upon the land; every 310 hides of land was assessed to build one vessel, and every eight hides to furnish a helmet and breastplate. Thus a naval force was raised which consisted of seven hundred and eighty-five ships, together with armour for 30,450 men. This fleet assembled at Sandwich. But treason and misfortune seem now to have dogged every step which the Saxons took. Wulfnoth, who was appointed one of the commanders, carried off twenty ships, and set up pirate. Brihtric, another leader, pursued him with eighty vessels, part of which the tempest wrecked, while the remainder fell into the hands of the traitor and pirate, Wulfnoth, and he burnt them. Such events as these extinguished the last ray of hope that dimly gleamed upon the disheartened Saxons. The Danes had now only to command and receive. Sixteen counties were at once given up to them, together with the sum of £48,000. Ethelred was now king of only a portion of England; every day the people began to secede from him, and to shelter themselves under the sovereignty of the king of Denmark. It would only be a dry and wearisome catalogue of names, to run over the roll of cities, as they one after another, opened their gates to the Danish king. London remained faithful to the last, and it was not until Ethelred fled to the isle of Wight, and afterwards to Normandy, where he was kindly received by the duke, whose daughter he had married, that the metropolis of England acknowledged Swein as its sovereign, for the Saxons had at last become weary of being plundered by the Danes, and of the oppressive taxes which they had been constantly called upon to pay to their own king; so that they sat down sternly with folded arms, under a

* Thierry's Norman Conquest. European Library edition. Vol. I. pages 82 and 83.

new sovereignty, conscious that it could not be worse than the old. Swein, however, did not survive long to wear his regal honours, but died the year after his elevation to the English throne. Where the ancient town of Gainsborough looks down upon the silver Trent, that goes murmuring for miles through the still wild marshes of Lincolnshire, did Swein, the king of Denmark and of England, breathe his last; and a majestic pile of ruins, yet in parts inhabited, stands upon the site of the Mercian castle in which he died. After the death of Swein, the Danish population of England chose his son Canute, or Knut, as their sovereign; while the Saxon nobles sent messengers over to Normandy, offering to restore the crown to Ethelred, if he would "govern them more righteously than he had done before." The king dispatched his son Edmund with the necessary pledges, demanding in return that they should hold every Danish king an outlaw, who should declare himself monarch of England; to this they consented, and having pledged himself "to amend all that had been complained of," Ethelred, the Unready, returned to England.

Canute was, however, resolved to maintain the crown which his father had won, and in order to intimidate the Saxons, he landed at Sandwich the hostages which Swein had received from the English as pledges of their good faith and submission, after having cruelly cut their hands and faces; these chiefly consisted of the sons of the Saxon nobility—a savage retaliation for the Danish massacre which Ethelred had authorized.

Following the policy adopted by Athelstan, Ethelred now made an offer of high rewards to every warrior, of whatever country, who chose to come and fight under the Saxon standard—many came, and amongst the number, Olave, a celebrated Vikingr, who afterwards obtained the crown of Norway. Canute also secured the aid of one of the Norwegian earls, named Eric.

Edmund, surnamed Ironsides, who was the illegitimate son of Ethelred, now began to distinguish himself by his opposition to the Danish king, and to him the Saxons already looked up as a deliverer, even before his father died, which event took place at the close of the year 1016. As the struggles between the English and the Danes were carried on with great vigour by Edmund Ironside and Canute, they become matter of history which are connected with the next brief reign.

We find a gloomy picture of the miserable state of England,

during the sovereignty of Ethelred, in the following complaint made by a Saxon bishop who was living at the period: "We perpetually pay the Danes tribute," says this old divine, "and they ravage us daily. They burn, spoil, and plunder, and carry off our property to their ships. Such is their successful valour, that one of them will in battle, put ten of our men to flight. Two or three will drive a troop of captive Christians through the country, from sea to sea. Very often they seize the wives and daughters of our thanes, and cruelly violate them before the great chieftain's face. The slave of yesterday becomes the master of his lord to-day, or he abandons his master, flies to the sea-kings, and seeks his owner's life in the first battle that is waged against us. Soldiers, famine, flames, and effusion of blood, are found on every side. Theft and murder, pestilences, diseases, calumny, hatred, and rapine, dreadfully afflict us. Widows are frequently compelled into unjust marriages; many are reduced to penury and are pillaged. The poor men are sorely seduced, and cruelly betrayed, and though innocent, are sold far out of this land to foreign slavery. Cradle-children are made slaves out of this nation, through an atrocious violation of the law for little stealings. The right of freedom is taken away; the rights of the servile are narrowed, and the right of charity is diminished. Freemen may not govern themselves, nor go where they wish, nor possess their own as they like. Slaves are not suffered to enjoy what they have obtained from their allowed leisure, nor what good men have benevolently given for them. The clergy are robbed of their franchises, and stripped of all their comforts."* Such was England at the period when the sceptre was all but wrested from the descendants of Alfred, and about to be wielded by the hand of a Danish king. At the last struggle which was made to retain it, before the Saxon glory was for a time eclipsed, we have now arrived.

* Turner's Anglo-Saxon, page 325, vol. ii. Edition, 1836.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EDMUND, SURNAMED IRONSIDE.

“ His death, whose spirit lent a fire
 Even to the dullest peasant in his camp,
 Being bruited once, took fire and heat away
 From the best tempered courage in his troops:
 For from his metal was his party steeled;
 Which, once in him abated, all the rest
 Turned on themselves, like dull and heavy lead.”

SHAKSPERE.

EDMUND, who, for his valour and hardy constitution, was surnamed Ironside, had already distinguished himself against the Danes, and shown signs of promise, which foretold that, whenever the sceptre fell into his hand, it would be ably wielded. Like those meteoric brilliancies which startle us by their sudden splendour, then instantly depart, so was his career—bright, beautiful, and brief. We perceive a trailing glory along the sky over which he passed, but no steady burning of the star that left it behind. Had he ascended the throne at a peaceful and prosperous period, he might probably have dozed away his days in apathy; for he was one of those spirits born to blaze upon the fiery front of danger, and either speedily to consume, or be consumed. He began by measuring his stature against a giant, and raised himself so high by his valiant deportment, that had a little longer time been allowed him to develope his growth, he would have overtopped the great Canute, by whose side he stood.

He had scarcely leisure to put off the mourning which he had worn at his father's funeral, before he was compelled to arm in defence of the capital of the kingdom; for the Danish forces, headed by Canute, had already laid siege to London, and nearly the half of England was at that period in the possession of his enemies. The struggle to carry the capital was maintained with great spirit by the besiegers, and as bravely repelled by the besieged; and the wall which then ran along the whole front of the city, beside the Thames, was the scene of many a valorous exploit. A bridge, even at this early period, stretched over into Southwark, and on the Surrey side it was stoutly defended

by the enemy, who for a long time held the Saxons at bay; for they were strengthened by the ships which Canute had brought up from Greenwich, and placed on the west side of the bridge; thus cutting off all aid from the river; while he left a part of his fleet below, to guard against surprise from the mouth of the Thames. London was so strongly protected by its fortresses and citizens, that Edmund was enabled to remove a great portion of his army, and to fight two battles in the provinces during the time it was besieged.

The most important of these was his engagement at Searstan, where he addressed his soldiers before commencing the battle, and so kindled their valour by his eloquence, that at the first onset, which was sounded by the braying of the trumpets, the Danish soldiers staggered as if the weight of a mighty avalanche had come thundering down amongst them. Edmund himself fought amid the foremost ranks—there was no sword that went deeper into the advanced line of the enemy than his own—no arm that made such bleeding gaps as the sovereign's. He seemed as if present in almost every part of the field at once—wherever his eager eye caught a wavering motion in the ranks, there he was seen to rally, and cheer them on. Edric, who had long been in the service of Ethelred, fought on the side of Canute, and by his influence arrayed the men of Wiltshire and Somerset against Edmund. So obstinately was the battle maintained on both sides, that neither party could claim the victory when night settled down upon the hard-fought field.

The dawn of a summer morning saw the combat renewed. While yet the silver dew hung pure and rounded upon the blood-stained grass, the Saxon trumpets sounded the charge. Foremost as ever in the conflict, Edmund fought his way into the very thickest of the strife, until he found himself face to face with Canute. The first blow which the Saxon king aimed at his enemy, Canute received upon his shield: it was cloven asunder; and with such force had the sword of Edmund descended, that after severing the buckler, the edge of the weapon went deep into the neck of the horse which the Danish king bestrode. The English monarch still stood alone amid a crowd of Danes, making such destructive circles with his two-handed sword, that no one dared approach him. After having slightly wounded Canute, and slain several of his choicest warriors, Edmund was compelled to fall back amongst his own soldiers, whom he now found in retreat and confusion.

While Edmund was thus busily engaged in the very heart of the battle, the traitor Edric had struck off the head of a soldier, named Osmear, whose countenance closely resembled that of the king, and holding it by the hair, he had ridden rapidly along the Saxon lines, exclaiming: "Fly! fly! and save yourselves—behold the head of your king." Edmund had just succeeded in fighting his way through the Danish ranks, when he beheld the panic which Edric had spread amongst the soldiers—his first act was to seize a spear and hurl it at the traitor—he stooped, missed the blow, and the weapon pierced two soldiers who stood near him. Edmund then threw down his helmet, and taking the advantage of a rising ground, stood up bareheaded, and called upon his warriors to renew the combat; but many were already beyond hearing. It was now near sunset, for the conflict had lasted all day long, and those who rallied around him were just sufficient to keep up the struggle without retreating, until darkness again dropped down upon the scene. So ended the second day, and neither side could claim the victory. Edmund again encamped upon the battle-field, for he had still sufficient faith in the force that remained with him to renew the contest in the morning. Day-dawn, however, revealed the departure of the Danes, and the Saxons found themselves alone, surrounded by the wounded and the dead; for Canute had taken advantage of the midnight darkness, and retreated from the field. The Danish king hurried off with his army to renew the siege of London; Edmund followed him, and drove the enemy as far as Brentford. Here another battle took place; and as we find Canute, soon after, once more beleaguering the capital, the advantages the Saxon king gained could only have been slight. Seeing that he could make no impression upon London, Canute next led his army into Mercia, where he appears to have met with but little opposition; he is said to have burnt every town he approached. At Otford, in Kent, Edmund once more attacked the Danish king, and drove him to Sheppey. Unfortunately, the Saxon sovereign had admitted Edric the traitor again into his friendship, and he betrayed him; but for this, it is questionable if Canute could have maintained another attack.

It was on the eve of one of these battles, in which the northmen were defeated, that a Danish chief, named Ulfr, who was hotly pursued by the Saxons, rushed into a wood, in the hurry of defeat, and lost his way. It was no uncommon hardship

for a sea-king to throw himself at the foot of the nearest oak, pillow his head upon the root, and sleep soundly until the morning; he would only miss the murmur of the ocean, and, to make up for its lulling sound, would be saved the trouble of raising his hand every now and then to sweep off the salt spray that dashed over him. But the dawn of day found him no better off than the midnight; he would have known what course to have steered had he been out alone upon the open ocean, but in a forest, where one tree looked, in his eyes, just like another, he knew not on what tack to sail. After wandering about for some time, he met a Saxon peasant, who was driving home his oxen, at that early hour, for it was probably dangerous to allow them to be found in the forest after daylight, as the forest-laws were already severe. The Danish chief first accosted the churl, by inquiring his name. "It is Godwin," answered the peasant; "and you are one of the Danes who were compelled yesterday to fly for your life." The sea-king acknowledged it was true, and asked the herdsman if he could guide him either to the Danish ships, or to where the army was encamped. "The Dane must be mad," answered Godwin, "who trusts to a Saxon for safety." Ulfrentreated this rude Gurth of the forest to point him out the way, at the same time urging his argument by presenting the herdsman with a massive gold ring, to win his favour. Godwin looked at the ring—it was probably the first time in his life he had ever seen so costly a treasure—and after having carefully examined it, he again placed it in the hand of the sea-king, and said, "I will not take this, but will show you the way." Ulf spent the day at the herdsman's cottage; night came, and found Godwin in readiness to be his guide. The herdsman had an aged father, who, before he permitted his son to depart, thus addressed the Danish chief—"It is my only son whom I allow to accompany you; to your good faith I entrust him; for, remember, that there will no longer be any safety for him amongst his countrymen, if it is once known that he has been your guide. Present him to your king, and entreat him to take my son into his service." Ulf promised, and he kept his word, since there is no doubt that the young herdsman had gained upon his favour during the journey, for when the sea-king reached the Danish encampment, he took the peasant into his own tent, placed him upon a seat, (a great honour in those days,) which was as high as the one he himself occupied, and

treated him as if he had been his own son. This humble cow-herd, who afterwards married the sea-king's sister, will, ere long, have to figure amongst the most prominent characters in our history, but we must leave him for a time, and follow the fortunes of the Saxon king, Edmund.

After sustaining the alternations of victory and defeat—having been again betrayed by Edric, and making an offer to Canute to decide the fate of the kingdom by single combat, a challenge which the Danish king is generally believed to have declined—a treaty was entered into by the rival sovereigns, in which it was agreed that England should be divided between them. They then, to all appearance, became friends, exchanged gifts and garments, and the opposing armies for a time separated: Edmund to reign in the south, and Canute to be king of the north—the exact division of the kingdom is not recorded. It was, however, a hollow treaty on the part of the Dane, who is said afterwards to have rewarded every one who brought him the head of a Saxon.

Edmund did not long survive this treaty; that he was assassinated, there remains not a doubt, but where, or by whose hand, is unknown. Two of his own chamberlains are said to have been bribed, by either Edric or Canute, to destroy him. His death took place in the year 1016. Unlike Ethelred, "he was long and deeply lamented by his people," though his reign was so short. With his death, all hopes of regaining the kingdom from the power of the Danes seems, for a time, to have departed, and Canute was allowed to sit down upon the Saxon throne without opposition. More than five hundred years, with but few intervals of peace between, had elapsed since Hengist and Horsa first landed in the Isle of Thanet; yet all the blood which during that long period had been spilt, had been insufficient to cement firmly together the foundation on which the tottering throne was erected. Neither the blood of Britons, Romans, Saxons, nor Danes, could extinguish the volcano which was ever bursting from beneath it; the cry that issued forth was still, "Give, give!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

CANUTE THE DANE.

“He doth bestride the world
 Like a Colossus: and we petty men
 Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
 To find ourselves dishonourable graves.”—SHAKSPERE.

BY the death of Edmund, Canute became king of all England in the twentieth year of his age. Before his coronation took place, he assembled the Saxon nobles and bishops, and Danish chiefs in London, who had been witnesses to the treaty entered into between himself and Edmund, when the kingdom was divided; and either by intimidation, persuasion, or presents, succeeded in obtaining their unanimous assent to his succession to the crown. In return for this acknowledgment, he promised to act justly and righteously, and placed his bare hand upon the hands of his chiefs and nobles as a token of his sincerity. But in spite of these promises, the commencement of his reign was marked by acts of unnecessary severity and cruelty. Those who had been in any way related to either Ethelred or Edmund, he banished; and many who had taken a prominent part in the late struggles to support the Saxon monarchy, he put to death. He also decreed that Edwig, the half brother of Edward, should be slain. The late king had left two children, one of whom was named Edmund after himself, and the other Edward; Canute, with the approbation of the Saxon nobles, became their guardian; and no sooner were they placed within his power, than he meditated their destruction; but a fear that his throne was not sufficiently established to prevent the Saxons from rising to revenge their death, caused him to postpone it; and under the plea of securing their safety, the children were committed to the charge of the king of Sweden; the messenger who accompanied them at the same time giving instructions that they were to be secretly killed. But the Swedish sovereign was not willing to become a murderer at the bidding of Canute, and therefore committed the children to the care of the king of Hungary, by whom they were preserved and educated.

Edmund died, but Edward lived to marry the daughter of the emperor of Germany, and from their union sprang Edgar Atheling, a name that afterwards figures in the pages of History.

Edward and Alfred, the remaining sons of Ethelred, were still safe at the court of their uncle, Richard, duke of Normandy, with their mother, Emma, the dowager queen; and scarcely was Canute seated upon the throne before the Norman duke despatched an embassy to the English court, demanding that the crown of England should be restored to his eldest nephew. Emma, it will be remembered, was herself a Norman, and although she became the wife of Ethelred, her sympathies never seem to have leaned much on the side of the Saxons. As early as the time of the invasion of Swein, she had fled to her brother's court with her children, nor does it appear that she returned with her husband, Ethelred, when he was reinstated upon the throne. Whether the proposition first emanated from Canute, or her brother, the Norman duke, is somewhat uncertain; but whichever way it might be, it was soon followed up by the marriage of Emma, the widow of Ethelred, the dowager-queen of the Saxons, with Canute, the Danish king, and now the sole sovereign of England. The murdering, the banishing, the usurping Dane, became the husband of "The Flower of Normandy." After her union, it is said that she paid no regard to the Saxon princes whom she left at her brother's court, but, like an unnatural mother, abandoned them to chance; and that, as they grew up, they forgot even the language of their native country, and followed the habits and customs of the Normans, for Emma soon became the mother of a son by Canute, and disowned for ever her Saxon offspring.

After his marriage with Emma, Canute disbanded the greater portion of his Danish troops, and reserving only forty of his native ships, sent back the remainder of his fleet to Denmark. Canute then chiefly confined his government to that part of the island which Alfred the Great had reigned over; for it is on record that he ever held in the highest veneration the memory of this celebrated king. He made Turketul, to whom he was greatly indebted for the subjection of England, governor of East Anglia. To Eric, the Norwegian prince, he gave the government of Northumbria, and to the traitor, Edric, Mercia.

Although he had in turn deserted Ethelred, Edmund, and even Canute himself, he entrusted to him the government of this kingdom. The traitor, however, was not allowed to retain the dignities of his new dukedom long: a quarrel is said to have taken place between him and Canute, in the palace which overlooked the Thames at London. Edric is said to have urged his claim to greater rewards, by exclaiming, in the heat of his passion, "I first deserted Edmund to benefit you, and for you I killed him." Canute paced the apartment, angrily, coloured deeply, bit his lips, and while his eyes, which were always unnaturally fierce and bright, seemed to flash fire, he replied, "'Tis fit, then, you should die, for your treason to God and me. You killed your own lord! him who by treaty and friendship was my brother! Your blood be upon your own head for murdering the Lord's anointed; your own lips bear witness against you." Such a sentence came but with an ill grace from one who had encouraged, countenanced, and rewarded villany; but Canute, though young, was a deep adept in the blackest arts of kingcraft. He either called in, or gave a secret signal to Eric, the Norwegian, who most likely was present at the interview; for, having killed one king, we should hardly think Canute considered himself safe, alone with a murderer; but be this as it may, Eric laid him lifeless with one blow from his battle-axe; and, without creating any disturbance in the palace, the body of Edric was thrown out of the window into the Thames. The old historians considerably differ in their descriptions of the manner of his death, though the majority agree that the deed was done in the palace at London.

In 1019, so firmly had Canute established himself upon the throne of England, that he paid a visit to his native country of Denmark, where he passed the winter. But the government of England appears not to have been conducted to his satisfaction during his absence, for on his return he banished the duke Ethelwerd, whom he had left in a situation of great trust, and, shortly after, Turketul, the governor of East Anglia. A Swedish fleet, soon after this period, is said to have attacked the forces of Canute, and the victory, on the side of the English, is rumoured to have been owing to the valour of Godwin, who, at the close of the reign of Edmund, was a humble cowherd, but had, in the space of a few brief years, risen to the dignity of an earl. In his conflict with the Swedes, Ulfr, the patron of

Godwin, was instrumental in saving Canute's life. After this they quarrelled at a feast. It appears that they were amusing themselves with some game at the time, and that Ulfr, well acquainted with the natural irritability of the Dane's temper, had either retired, or was about to retreat, when Canute accused him of cowardice. Ulfr, ill-brooking an accusation which he seems never to have merited, angrily exclaimed, "Was I a coward when I rescued you from the fangs of the Swedish dogs?" As in the case of Edric, the Dane liked not to have those about him to whom he had been obliged; it was indifferent to him whether they did his work by valour or treachery; thus, shortly after, Ulfr was stabbed by the command of Canute, while performing his religious duties in a neighbouring church.

He next turned his attention towards Norway, over which Eglaf, or St. Olave, as he has been called by some, now reigned. The Dane is said to have commenced his attack by corrupting the Norwegian subjects with presents of money. This done, he went boldly over, with a fleet of fifty ships, carrying with him many of the bravest of the Saxon nobles. From the preparations which he had made, and the formidable force with which he appeared, he was received with that apparent welcome which necessity is sometimes compelled to accord, and, wherever he approached, was hailed as "Lord." After having carried away with him as hostages the sons and relations of the principal Norwegian chiefs, he appointed Haco, the son of that Eric whose battle-axe was ever ready to do his bidding, governor of the kingdom. Haco returned to England for his wife, who was residing at the castle of his father, the governor of Northumbria, but a heavy storm coming on, he was unable to land. His ship was last seen looming in the evening sunset, off Caithness, in Scotland, while the wind was blowing heavily in the direction of Pentland Frith, but neither Haco, his crew, nor his ship, were ever beheld again, after the sun had sunk behind the billows.

After this, Eglaf returned to the throne of Norway, and was put to death by the hands of his subjects for making laws and founding institutions which were calculated to accelerate the progress of learning and civilization. Norway, which had for centuries sent from its stormy shores such swarms of sea-kings and pirates, could not be brought to understand that they should

ever reap such benefits, if they changed their habits of rapine and robbery for those of honesty and industry, and the more rational pleasures of civilized life. They understood the laws of "strandhug," and they acknowledged no other. If they landed upon a hospitable shore, amongst a nation with whom they were at peace, and found their provisions growing short, they recruited their stock from the flocks and herds they saw grazing in the neighbouring pastures, paid whatever amount they pleased as the value of the animals they had slaughtered, carried off corn and drink under the same free-trade tariff; and sometimes, when remonstrated with on the smallness of the amount paid, settled the balance by the blow of a battle-axe.

Although Canute was the son of a pagan, he became a zealous Christian, rebuilt many of the monasteries which his father had burnt, endowed others, and, either from a feeling of piety, or to ingratiate himself with the Saxons, he erected a monument to Elfeg, the archbishop, at Canterbury, whose violent death had doubtless been accelerated by those very veterans who had assisted him in conquering the Saxons.

Not content with honouring the murdered archbishop with a monument, he resolved that the body should be placed in the abbey which had witnessed the services of so pious a primate; so he demanded the body of the bishop from the inhabitants of London, who had purchased it from the Danes, and buried it in their own city. The Londoners, however, refused to deliver it up; when the Dane, mingling the old habits of the sea-king with his devotions, put on his helmet and breastpiece, placed himself at the head of his troops, carried off the coffin by force, and, between two long lines of his armed soldiers, that were drawn up on each side of the street which led from the church to the Thames, had the dead body of the archbishop borne to the war-ship, which stood ready to receive it. There is something of magnificence in such an act of barbarous veneration as this, which was accomplished without either injury or bloodshed; and we can imagine that in every corner of the London of that day, nothing was talked of but the daring piety of Canute, which had led him to carry off the body of their reputed saint; that public opinion would be divided in the motives it attributed to such an act; that little groups would assemble at the corners of the streets, and that long after twilight had settled down upon the old city, their conversation would still be about Canute

and his soldiers, and the enormous war-ship, with its gilt figure-head, that resembled a dragon, and the dead bishop it would carry away; then the city-gates would be closed, and over all would reign the ancient midnight silence and darkness, while the dragon-headed ship and the Danes went slowly down the silver Thames, freighted with the king, and the coffin, and the murdered man.

There appears, at a first glance, something incongruous in such an act as that of Canute's carrying off the dead body of the bishop by force, when it was done with the intent of making a favourable impression upon the Saxons; yet we must not forget the stout resistance made by the capital in the defence of Edmund, which the Danish king seems also to have borne in mind, when he exacted from the city the sum of eleven thousand pounds.

Canute seems to have been a man in whom the elements of refinement and barbarism, which our ancient writers love to dwell upon in their moral masks, were oddly blended; he was one who believed that cruelty was necessary in the administration of justice, but looked with horror upon a deed that was committed without the pale of this shadowy boundary.

In a moment of unguarded passion, he with his own hand slew one of his soldiers; thereby committing a deed which, according to his own laws, the penalty was, in its mildest form, a heavy mulct. After reflecting upon the crime he was guilty of, and the evil example he was setting to others, he assembled his army, and, arrayed in his royal robes, descended from his gorgeous throne in the midst of the armed ranks; expressed his sorrow for the deed he had done, and demanded that he should be tried and punished like the humblest subject over whom he reigned. He further offered a free pardon to his judges, however severe might be the judgment they passed upon him; then throwing himself prostrate upon the ground, in silence awaited their verdict. Many a hardy soldier, whose weather-beaten cheeks were seamed with the scars of battle, is said to have shed tears as he beheld the royal penitent thus prostrate at his feet. Those who were appointed judges retired for a few moments to deliberate; but either believing that Canute was not sincere, or having the example of those before their eyes who had formerly done his bidding, they timidly resolved to allow him to appoint his own punishment. This he did, and as the

fine for killing a man was then forty talents of silver, he sentenced himself to pay three hundred and sixty, beside nine talents of gold. It would, perhaps, be uncharitable to say that the whole affair was a mere mockery; but when we remember that a word from his lips could wring a thousand times that amount from the oppressed Saxons, and that he himself had compelled them to pay heavier taxes than had ever been demanded by their own native kings, we are surely justified in concluding, that after all, he acquitted himself on very moderate terms.

During the ravages of the Danes, the tribute which the Saxons paid to Rome had been suspended. This Canute resolved to revive; and, as if to make up for the ravages of his countrymen, the sea-kings, for the monks they had murdered, and the churches they had destroyed, he inflicted a tax of a penny on every inhabited house, which was called Peter's-pence; thus further punishing the poor Saxons, by levying a fine upon them "to the praise and glory of God," for so was the royal ordinance worded, that they might show their gratitude to mother church, through the hands of those who had been instrumental in slaughtering their priests, overthrowing their altars, and desolating their land. In brief, it was the descendant of the murderer levying a tax upon the relatives of the murdered to purchase forgiveness for the slayer—one of those crooked paths by which, in that barbarous age, men hoped to reach Heaven.

The plan he adopted to reprove his flattering courtiers displayed, at best, much unnecessary show. A man who, by his valour and abilities, had ascended a throne which had been occupied by a long line of kings, and although an open enemy, had compelled a powerful nation to acknowledge him as their sovereign—one who had himself ridden over the stormy sea, and been tossed like a weed from billow to billow, can never be supposed to have entertained the thought for a moment that the angry ocean with its rising tide would obey him, or roll back its restless waves when he commanded. It was the same love of display which caused him to erect the throne in the midst of his army, and step forth in his royal robes, the haughty king, while he assumed the part of the humble penitent for having slain one of his soldiers. The same theatrical display which caused him to order his lumbering throne to be placed beside the sea-shore,

and to sit down in all his kingly dignity, robed, crowned, and sceptered—the gilt and tinsel that are so effective beyond the footlights—induced him to adopt this stage effect; for Canute, in the dress of a common man, with his foot in the spray, would not have produced half that impression upon his audience, many of whom, we can readily imagine, must have felt disgusted at such useless parade. In a pompous manner, he is said to have thus addressed his courtiers:—"Confess ye now how frivolous and vain is the might of an earthly king compared to that Great Power who rules the elements, and can say unto the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.'" We should not probably err much if, instead of the words uttered by the Danish king, something like the following was the real language of his inward thought, and that, as he looked sternly upon them, he said to himself, "Think not that I believe you such idiots as to suppose that the sea will obey my bidding—a breath of mine would sever the proudest head that now rises above the beach. I alone am king, more powerful than any present, and I only want to prove that there is but One mightier than I am, and that while the waves wash my feet, they would surely drown such common rascals as you all are." In a word, the whole scene is too rich a piece of mockery to be treated seriously. It is as if a man mounted a lofty steeple, and threw down his hat, merely to convince the spectators below that if his head had been in it, it would assuredly have been broken. It is but the old cry of the Mahometan fruit-seller, which ends with, "In the name of the prophet—figs." Another proof of his overbearing vanity is given in his conduct to Thorarin, the Danish bard. The poet had written some verses in praise of Canute. It appears that the king was either engaged or seated at the banquet when the scald intreated of him to listen to the verses which he had written, urging as a reason, what a patron in modern times would most likely have listened to—namely, that they were but short. The Dane, however, true to his character, in a love of display and praise, turned round indignantly upon Thorarin, and in an angry tone exclaimed, "Are you not ashamed to do what none but yourself would dare—to write a *short* poem upon me? Unless by to-morrow at noon you produce above thirty verses on the same subject, your head shall be forfeited." The poor bard retired, and having whipped his muse into the finest order for lying and flattering, he by the next day



Canute rebuking his Courtiers.

produced such a splendid piece of adulation, that the praising monarch rewarded him with fifty marks of silver.

Following the example of the Saxon kings, Canute made a pilgrimage to Rome, to visit the tombs of the saints: although accompanied by a large train of attendants, he himself bore a wallet upon his shoulder, and carried a long pilgrim's staff in his hand. On every altar he, with his own hand, placed rich gifts—doubtless, wrung from many a poor Saxon—pressed the pavement with his lips, and knelt down before the shrines; he purchased the arm of St. Augustine, for which he paid a hundred talents of gold and the same number of talents in silver, and this he afterwards presented to the church of Coventry. He then despatched a letter to England, which has been frequently quoted by ancient historians. It is curious as a specimen of early epistolary art, and places the character of Canute in a much more favourable light than the incidents which we have above described; and as we obtain through it glimpses of the manners and customs of this remote period, we shall present it entire:—

“Knut, king of England and Denmark, to all the bishops and primates and all the English people, greeting. I hereby announce to you that I have been to Rome for the remission of my sins, and the welfare of my kingdoms. I humbly thank the Almighty God for having granted me, once in my life, the grace of visiting in person his very holy apostles Peter and Paul, and all the saints who have their habitation, either within the walls, or without the Roman city. I determined upon this journey because I had learned from the mouths of wise men, that the apostle Peter possesses great power to bind or to loose, and that he keeps the keys of the celestial kingdom; wherefore, I thought it useful to solicit specially his favour and patronage with God.

“During the Easter solemnity was held here a great assembly of illustrious persons,—namely, pope John, the emperor Kunrad, and all the chief men of the nations from Mount Gargano to the sea which surrounds us. All received me with great distinction, and honoured me with rich presents. I have received vases of gold and silver, and stuffs and vestments of great price; I have conversed with the emperor, the lord pope, and the other princes, upon the wants of all the people of my kingdoms, English and Danes. I have endeavoured to obtain for my people justice and security in their pilgrimages to Rome, and especially that

they may not for the future be delayed on their road by the closing of the mountain passes, or vexed by enormous tolls. I also complained to the lord pope of the immensity of the sums extorted, to this day, from my archbishops, when, according to custom, they repair to the apostolical court to obtain the pallium. It has been decided that this shall not occur for the future.

“I would also have you know that I have made a vow to Almighty God to regulate my life by the dictates of virtue, and to govern my people with justice. If during the impetuosity of my youth I have done anything contrary to equity, I will for the future, with the help of God, amend this to the best of my power; wherefore, I require and command all my councillors, and those to whom I have confided the affairs of my kingdom, to lend themselves to no injustice, either in fear of me, or to favour the powerful. I recommend them, if they prize my friendship and their own lives, to do no harm or violence to any man, rich or poor: let every one, in his place, enjoy that which he possesses, and not be disturbed in that enjoyment, either in the king’s name, or in the name of any other person; nor under pretext of levying money for my treasury, for I need no money obtained by unjust means.

“I propose to return to England this summer, and as soon as the preparations for my embarkation shall be completed. I intreat and order you all, bishops and officers of my kingdom of England, by the faith you owe to God and to me, to see that before my return all our debts to God be paid—namely, the plough dues, the tithe of animals born within the year, and the pence due to Saint Peter from every house in town and country; and further, at mid-August, the tithe of the harvest, and at Martinmas, the first fruit of the seed; and if, on my landing, these dues are not fully paid, the royal power will be exercised upon defaulters, according to the rigour of the law and without any mercy.”

Canute died in the year 1035, and was buried at Winchester.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REIGNS OF HAROLD HAREFOOT AND HARDICANUTE.

“What need I fear of thee?

But yet I'll make assurance doubly sure,
And take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live;
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder.”

BARNARDINE. “I have been drinking hard all night;
I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

DUKE. O, sir, you must: and therefore I beseech you,
Look forward on the journey you shall go.”

SHAKSPERE.

WHILE even the succession to the Saxon throne was sometimes disputed when not a doubt remained about the right of a claimant to the crown, it will not be wondered at, as at his death Canute left three sons, two of whom were beyond doubt illegitimate, that there should be some difference of opinion among the chiefs and earls respecting the election of a new sovereign. Hardicanute was the undoubted offspring of Emma and Canute; she, it will be remembered, being the widow of Ethelred at the time of her marriage with the Danish king. There is a doubt whether Harold, who ascended the throne after the death of Canute, was in any way related to the Danish king; or that his pretended mother, whose name was Alfgiva, and who was never married to Canute, finding that she was likely to have no children, passed off the son of a poor cobbler—whom she named Harold—as her own. It is said that Swein, the other reputed son of Canute, was introduced by her in the same way. The latter, Canute placed upon the throne of Norway during his lifetime, also expressing a wish before his death that Harold should rule over England, and that Hardicanute, his undisputed son, should succeed him as king of Denmark. Beside these claimants, it must be borne in mind that the children of Ethelred were still alive, although, as we have before shown, wholly neglected by the twice-widowed queen, Emma. The witenagemot assembled at Oxford to elect a new sovereign; and as there were by this time several Danish chiefs among the council, a division at once took place, the Danish party making

choice of Harold, while the Saxons, headed by the powerful earl Godwin, once the humble cowherd, preferred Hardicanute, because his mother had been the wife of a Saxon king. A third party advocated the claims of the sons of Ethelred, who were still in Normandy. Leofric, earl of Mercia, ranged his forces on the side of Harold; and even London shook off its allegiance to the old Saxon line, and proclaimed in his favour.

Although Hardicanute was in Denmark, earl Godwin resolved to maintain his right to the throne; and it was not until the country was on the very eve of a civil war, and when many of the inhabitants had fled into the wild parts to avoid its ravages, that the Saxon earl compelled the partisans of Harold to give up all the provinces south of the Thames to Hardicanute. Thus Godwin and Emma ruled in the south, in behalf of Hardicanute, and held their court at Winchester; while Harold, with London for his capital, and the whole country north of the Thames for his dominions, was acknowledged king of England; although it is on record, that the archbishop refused to crown him, because the children of Ethelred were still alive; that he even forbade any of the bishops to administer the benediction, but placing the crown and sceptre upon the altar, left him to crown, anoint, and bless himself as he best could.

But whoever's son Harold might be, he resented this slight with all the spirit of a true sea-king. He crowned himself without the aid of the Saxon bishops; despised their blessings, and, instead of attending church, sallied out with his hounds to hunt during the hours of divine service; and so fleet was he of foot in following the chase, that he obtained the surname of Harefoot. He set no store by the Christian religion, but defied all the bishops in Christendom, sounded his hunting horn while the holy anthem was chaunted, and conducted himself in every way like a hard-drinking, misbelieving Dane.

We again arrive at one of those mysterious incidents which occasionally darken the pages of history, and render it difficult to get at the real actors of the tragedy. A letter is written—the sons of Ethelred are invited over to England. One arrives—he is to all appearance hospitably received; in the night his followers are murdered, and he himself shortly after put to a most cruel death. That the events we are about to record took place, has

never been doubted; the obscurity that will, probably, for ever reign around them, conceals the real instigator of the deed.

Emma, it appears, was at this time living at the court of Harold in London, when a letter arrived at Normandy (as if from her), earnestly urging her sons, Edward and Alfred, to return to England—stating, that the Saxons were already weary of the Danish king, and were anxious to place the crown upon either of their heads. The letter was answered by Alfred, the youngest, appearing in person, accompanied by a troop of Norman soldiers; which was contrary to the advice of the letter, as the instructions it contained especially requested them to come secretly. He first attempted to land at Sandwich, but why he altered his mind, and went round the North Foreland, has never been satisfactorily accounted for; for we cannot see what difference it made whether earl Godwin received him at one point or the other. It is, however, just probable that a party of Danes, or those who were favourable to Harold, may by chance, or by command, have been stationed at the spot Alfred first selected for debarkation, the secret having got bruited abroad.

But be this as it may, the Saxon prince at last landed somewhere between Herne-bay and the Isle of Sheppy, and when he had advanced a short distance into the country he was met by earl Godwin, who swore fealty to him, and promised to bring him safely to his mother Emma, wishing him, however, to avoid London, where Harold then resided, and with whom there is some slight reason to believe Godwin was now in league, though this suspicion hangs by a very slender thread. It is probable that the powerful earl took a dislike to the strong body of Normans who accompanied Alfred; and, jealous that the power he sought to obtain by raising the Saxon prince to the throne of England might be weakened by these retainers, he resolved to cut them off at once, then make the best terms he could.

The Saxon prince and his followers, who amounted to about seven hundred, were quartered for the night in the town of Guildford, just as accommodation could be found for them, in parties of ten and twelve—in every lodging abundance of meat and drink was provided. Earl Godwin was in attendance upon Alfred until late at night, and when he departed, he promised to wait upon him early in the morning. Morning came, but the earl made not his appearance, and it would not be unreasonable to suppose that the partisans of Harold had heard of the arrival

of Godwin, that they entered Guildford in the night, and that Godwin and his followers, who were unequal to cope with the Danish force, escaped. Further, that these were the Danes whom Alfred had seen while off Sandwich, and, since the course of his steering round the North Foreland, and landing near the Isle of Sheppy, they had crossed the country. If so, the Saxon prince and his Norman followers must have marched through Kent and into Surrey, within a few miles of the Danish army, who were probably watching the motions of both Godwin and Alfred. Harold may have caused the letter to have been written, and confided his plans to Godwin, and the latter have resolved to rescue the son of Ethelred from the snare that was set to entrap him, for Godwin was fully competent to execute such an act if a favourable opportunity offered itself. Emma may have been in earnest, yet her purpose before accomplished might have been betrayed, for although she is accused of having been an unkind mother, there is no proof of that cruelty of disposition evinced, which would justify us in concluding that she countenanced the murder of her son. She might cling more fondly to Hardicanute, who was her youngest child, than to the rest—such a feeling is not uncommon. But these doubts and reasons might be multiplied into pages, and then we should probably be as wide apart from the truth.

In the old town of Guildford, above 900 years ago, nearly seven hundred foreigners, most of them strangers to England, retired to rest, some fondly dreaming of the possessions they should obtain when the prince whose fortunes they followed ascended the throne. Weary with their long journey, others would fall at once to sleep, without bestowing a thought upon the morrow, for that night there appears to have been no lack of either food or wine. When hark, hark! it is the dead midnight, and the chambers in which they sleep are filled with armed men—figures in armour, some holding lights, others with their swords pointed, bend over them—men who grasp strong spears are stationed at the doors—some bind their arms with cords—they attempt to reach their weapons, but find they have been removed—some struggle for a few moments, but are speedily overpowered. Chains and ropes are at hand, stern-looking men set their teeth together, and kneel upon them until their limbs are bound—and in every house at the self same hour they are all secured and made prisoners. A few defended

themselves and were slain. What a night must that have been in the old town of Guildford—what Saxon hearts must have ached at day-dawn, when the maidens beheld the young and handsome foreigners led to execution! for some, doubtless, over their cups, had boasted, that when the Saxon prince had “regained his own,” they would return again—and fond, foolish old mothers, whose hearts beat in favour of the royal Saxon, may have wetted their lips, and drank destruction to the Danes, and talked about what they had heard their great-grandmothers say of Alfred the Great, and hoped that he who then aspired to the throne would be found worthy of the name he bore:—for a hundred years would only have added to the fame of the great king, and in that old Saxon town there were doubtless many living whose ancestors had fought under Alfred the Great.

The morning that dawned upon the grey country witnessed the execution of the Normans; they were led to death in tens, and one out of every ten was left alive—the rest perished; but whether beheaded by the battle-axe, or pierced through with the sword or spear, or hung upon the nearest oak, history has not recorded. But whether Godwin or Harold was the cause of their death will never now be known. Vengeance, who is never silent, bore their dying groans to the shores of Normandy, and from that hour Revenge rose up, and, with his red right arm bared, pointed with his bloody sword to the shores of England. For thirty years that grim landmark stood pointing over the sea, until at last it leaped from the stormy headland, and led the way to the blood-stained shores of Britain.

Meantime, the Saxon prince was carried captive to London, when, after having endured the insults and reproaches of Harold, he was hurried off to Ely, to be tried by a mock court of Danish judges, who, after having offered him every insult they could invent, cruelly sentenced him to lose his eyes. The barbarous sentence was fulfilled, and a day or two after its execution death put an end to the sufferings of Alfred.

After the death of Alfred, Emma was banished from England by the command of Harold; an act which goes far to prove that she had been instrumental in tempting her ill-starred son to visit England, though it seems somewhat strange that she should take up her residence at Bruges, while her son Edward, who was the true heir to the English throne, yet resided in Normandy. She, however, despatched messengers to Denmark,

intreating her son Hardicanute to revenge the death of his maternal brother Alfred, who, she said, had been betrayed by earl Godwin, and assassinated by the command of Harold. During the remainder of the reign of Harold Harefoot, we lose sight of earl Godwin, so that if even he had any share in the plot which terminated in the murder of the young prince, it appears not to have advanced his interests at the court of Harold; who, before the close of his reign, attained the full title of king of England. Nor does it appear that Hardicanute ever set foot on the territory allotted to him by the council of Oxford, on the south of the Thames; and which, as we have shown, was held for a time on his behalf by Godwin, and his mother, Emma of Normandy. The son of Canute was at Bruges with his mother, having retired thither to consult her previous to his meditated invasion of England, when a deputation arrived there, from England, announcing the death of Harold. He had already left a strong fleet at the mouth of the Baltic, ready at his command, when the first favourable wind blew, to commence hostilities against Britain; nine ships, well armed, had also accompanied him on his visit to his mother, in Flanders, when, just as his plan of attack was decided upon, and all was in readiness for the invasion, Harold's brief and blood-stained reign terminated, in the year 1040, and he was buried at Westminster.

Nearly the first act that disgraced the reign of Hardicanute, was his disinterment of the body of Harold; which, after having exhumed and decapitated, he commanded to be thrown into the Thames, from which it was taken out by a Danish fisherman, and again interred in a cemetery in London, where the Danes only buried their dead. His next act was to summon earl Godwin before a court of justice, in which he was accused of being instrumental in procuring the death of Alfred. At the appointed day Godwin appeared; and, according to a law which was at that period extant, procured a sufficient number of witnesses to swear that they believed he was innocent of the crime of which he was accused. Godwin stepped forward, and swore, by the holy sacrament, "In the Lord: I am innocent, both in word and deed, of the charge of which I am accused." The witnesses then came forward, and taking the oath, exclaimed, "In the Lord: the oath is clean and upright that Earl Godwin has sworn." Simple and inefficient as such a mode of trial may

appear, it must be borne in mind that perjury was in those days visited with the severest punishment; not confined merely to bodily pain, the infliction of a heavy penalty, or the loss of worldly goods—but a perjured man was classed with witches, murderers, sorcerers, the wolfheads, and outcasts of society; and if slain, no one took cognizance of his death; he was debarred even from the trial of ordeal, and whether he was murdered or died, was refused the rites of Christian burial. Although Alfred had established the trial by jury, such a judicial custom as Godwin availed himself of continued to exist after the Norman conquest.

Such a legal proof, however, was not sufficient to satisfy the cupidity of Hardicanute; and the earl was compelled to purchase his favour by presenting him with a splendid ship, richly gilt, and manned by eighty warriors, armed with helmet and hauberk, each bearing a sword, a battle-axe, and a javelin, and their arms ornamented with golden bracelets, each of which weighed sixteen ounces. A Saxon bishop was also accused of having been leagued with Godwin, and he followed the example of the earl, by purchasing the king's favour with rich presents, which at this period appear to have been the readiest mode of procuring an acquittal. The two brief years that Hardicanute reigned, he seems to have passed in feasting and drinking; his banqueting table was spread out four times a-day, and his carousals carried far into the night. Such excesses could only be kept up by constant supplies of money; his "Huscarles," or household troops, were ever out levying taxes; and as these armed collectors were all Danes, many of them descendants of the old sea-kings, it will be readily imagined that the Saxons were the greatest sufferers, and compelled to contribute more than their share to this infamous Dane-geld, as the tax was called. But these marauders, although armed by kingly authority, did not always escape scathless. The inhabitants of Worcester rose up and killed two of the chiefs, who were somewhat too arbitrarily exceeding their duty. Hardicanute ordered a Danish army to march at once against the rebels, but when the authorized forces came up, they found the city abandoned; the inhabitants had forsaken their houses, and strongly entrenched themselves in a neighbouring island, and though a great part of the city was destroyed, the people remained unconquered. Such a brave example was

not lost upon the Saxons. Opposition was now offered in many quarters, and the Danish yoke at last became lighter; for Hardicanute seemed to care but little how his kingdom was ruled, so that his table was every day laden with good cheer, and his wine-cup filled whenever he called for it; for he had been nursed in the cradle of the sea-kings, and his chief delight was to sit surrounded by these stormy sons of the ocean, and to drink healths three fathom deep. Altogether, Hardicanute seems to have been a merry thoughtless king. He invited his half-brother, Edward, the son of Ethelred, over to England, and gave him and his Norman followers a warm welcome at his court; left his mother Emma, and earl Godwin, to manage the kingdom as they pleased, and died as he had lived, a hard-drinker, with the wine-cup in his hand.

It was at a marriage-feast, somewhere in Lambeth, in the year 1042, when Hardicanute drank his last draught. At a late hour in the night he rose, staggering, with the wine-cup in his hand, and pledged the merry company that were assembled—then drinking such a draught as only the son of a sea-king could swallow, he fell down senseless upon the floor, “and never word again spake he.” He was buried near his father Canute, in the church of Winchester. With his death ended the Danish race of kings; and Edward, the son of Ethelred, the descendant of a long line of Saxon monarchs, ascended the throne of England.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ACCESSION OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.

“It is the curse of kings to be attended by slaves.”

“Favourites, made proud by princes, that advance their pride
Against the power that bred it.”

“Thou wouldst be great. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily: wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win.”—SHAKSPEARE.

EDWARD, surnamed the Confessor, had resided in England for some time, when the throne became vacant by the death of Hardicanute; and the Danes, left without a leader by the sudden and unexpected demise of their king, had no means of resisting

the Saxon force, which all at once wheeled up on the side of Edward, and, led on by Godwin, placed the crown of England upon the head of the son of Ethelred. To strengthen the power which he already possessed, the earl Godwin proposed that the king should marry his daughter, Editha, who appears to have been a lady of high intellectual attainments: it was said of her, in contrast to the stern and ambitious character of her father, that, as the thorn produces the rose, so Godwin produced Editha. Ingulphus, one of the most celebrated historians living at this period, after describing her as being very beautiful, meek, modest, faithful, virtuous, a lady of learning, and the enemy of no one, says, "I have very often seen her, when, only a boy, I visited my father in the royal court. Often, as I came from school, she questioned me on letters and my verse; and willingly passing from grammar to logic, she caught me in the subtle nets of argument. I had always three or four pieces of money counted by her maiden, and was sent to the royal larder for refreshment." But all these amiable qualities were not sufficient to bring happiness to the royal hearth; the earl was ever stepping in between Edward and Editha, for Godwin became jealous of the Normans, who were constantly coming over, and obtaining dignities and honours from the court. Norman soldiers were placed over the English fortresses; Norman priests officiated in the Saxon churches, and, as the Danish power waned, and the offices which Hardicanute had given to his own countrymen became vacant, Edward filled up the places with his Norman favourites. Those who had befriended him in his exile came over—such as had grown up side by side with him till they reached manhood—had shared his sports and pastimes—dined at the same table with him when, without friend or companion, except his brother Alfred, he landed a stranger upon the shores of Normandy;—all such as had clung to him, and assisted him while he was in exile, now came over to congratulate their old acquaintance who had so suddenly emerged from his obscurity, and become, by the voice of the whole Saxon nation, and the tacit consent of the overawed and powerless Danes, the undisputed monarch of England. Edward, on the other hand, landed in his native country almost a stranger; he brought with him foreign habits, foreign manners, and even spake the Norman-French more fluently than the plain Saxon tongue of his ancestors. He was but a child when he left England, and nearly

thirty years residence in a foreign court must have caused his native language to have sounded harshly on his ears when he again landed on the shores of Britain. With the exception of those who accompanied him, England would seem like a strange country; he found none there whose habits and tastes were congenial to his own, none with whom he had interchanged the warm friendship which is natural to youth; and he must instinctively have shunned the advances made to him by earl Godwin, standing suspected, as he did, of having indirectly contributed to the death of his brother Alfred, or, at the least, of having deserted him in the night, and left him in the hands of the Danes. Either Edward must have stood far aloof from such suspicion, or, when he consented to marry the daughter of Godwin, have purchased the crown of England by making a sacrifice of his feelings and of his honour. Edward's mother, it will also be remembered, was a Norman, and while the friends of her son poured into the English court, she herself was followed by those who claimed kindred with her race, until even the very language of the Norman usurped that of the Saxon.

The Norman costume now became fashionable; those who were ambitious of rising in the king's favour, or who wished to stand high in the estimation of his favourites, began to speak in broken Norman, until, in the neighbourhood of the court, the Saxon seemed to have grown into an unfashionable language. One man alone, and he, the most powerful in the kingdom, still stuck sturdily to the old Saxon habits, and openly expressed his dislike of the Norman favourites. This was the cowherd, the son of Ulfnoth, whose daughter the king of England had married; and he, with his sons, who had proved themselves second to none in valour in the hard-fought field, rose up, and made head against the Norman encroachments. The Saxon earl, and his tall sons, boldly shouldered their way through the crowded court, where their sister and daughter reigned as queen; they lowered their helmets to no one, but rudely jostled as they passed the groups of knaves and place-seekers who infested the palace. Thus, without, at the folk-moots, and the guilds, the Saxon earl and his sons were the favourites of the people; while within, and about the palace, they were bitterly hated by the Norman favourites. Such was the state of parties at the English court nearly a thousand years ago, and it will be necessary for the reader to bear them in mind, for the

better understanding of the changes which they lead to—the invasion of England by the Normans—a period at which we are now rapidly arriving.

Whether Edward believed that his mother Emma had a share in the death of her son Alfred, or was stung with the remembrance that she had left them to the mercy of a strange court, and that his position in England was rendered uneasy by those who had followed him with their clamorous claims across the ocean, or he disliked her for the favour which she had shown to her Danish son, Hardicanute, or envious of the immense wealth and possessions she is said to have accumulated during the reckless reign of the hard-drinking sea-king—whether led by one or another of these motives of dislike and suspicion, or actuated by a wish to resent the neglect with which she had treated him, he seized upon her possessions, lessened her power, and either confined her in the abbey of Wearwell, or limited her residence within the compass of the lands he granted her near Winchester. This act was countenanced by Godwin, who, though he studied his own aggrandisement, seems never wholly to have neglected the interests of the Saxons. Her alleged intercourse with the bishop of Winchester—her passing through the ordeal of fire unscathed, with naked feet over burning plough-shares, are dim traditions entirely unauthenticated by any respectable historian, although such trials were not uncommon, as we shall show, when we come to treat of the manners and customs of the Anglo-Saxons. After this period, Emma of Normandy is scarcely mentioned again by our early historians.

During the second year of his reign, Edward was menaced with an invasion by Magnus, king of Norway and Denmark, who sent letters to England demanding the crown of Edward; to which the English king replied by mustering a large fleet at Sandwich, and declaring himself ready to oppose his landing. But the attention of Magnus was soon diverted from England to secure his new territory of Denmark, as Sweyn, the son of Ulfr, (the latter being the same sea-king whom the cowherd Godwin guided to the Danish camp when he had lost his way in the forest,) now aspired to the sceptre of Denmark. The son of Ulfr requested aid from Edward to support his claim to the Danish sceptre; and this request was strongly backed by earl Godwin, who, whatever other stain he may have had upon his character, cannot in this instance be accused of ingratitude, for

he earnestly pleaded that fifty ships should be fitted out, and sent to the aid of the son of his early patron. Godwin's proposition was, however, overruled by Leofric and Siward, earls of Mercia and Northumbria, who will frequently be seen to stand between earl Godwin and his claims upon the throne. What aid Godwin afforded the son of Ulfr of his own accord we know not, though it is on record that Sweyn obtained the crown of Denmark on the demise of Magnus, which happened shortly after the application he made for aid to Edward of England. With the death of Magnus ended all attempts upon the English crown on the part of the Danes, and we hear no more of the ravages of these stormy sea-kings, nor of the civil wars in England between these two nations, who had, through the alternations of war and peace, been settled in various parts of England long before the star of Alfred the Great rose up and illumined the dark night of our history. A new enemy was now, with slow and silent step, coming stealthily into England; he had already obtained a footing in the palace and in the church; he had left his slimy trail in the camp, and on the decks of the Saxon vessels; he had come with a strange voice, and muttered words which they could not understand.

Those who had often quarrelled were now neighbours; the difference in language and manners was beginning to disappear; for as they, to a certain extent, understood each other's dialect, the Saxon and the Danish idioms began to assimilate; they, with few exceptions, lived under the same common law; their children mingled and played together in the same streets, in the same fields and forests, became men and women, married, and forgot the quarrels of their forefathers, and at last began to settle down like one nation upon the soil. Thus, each party looked upon the Norman favourites with the same jealous eye.

With the exception of the bickerings both on the part of the Saxon and Danish chiefs against the Normans whom Edward countenanced, all went on in tolerable order at the Saxon court for seven or eight years; for Leofric and Siward were ever throwing their formidable weight into the opposite scale, and thus keeping an even balance between the power of Godwin and the throne. Edward had rendered himself popular with both the Danes and the Saxons; he had revived the old laws of his ancestors, abolished the odious tax of Dane-geld, without retaliating upon such of his subjects as belonged to that nation, as Canute and

Harold had beforetime done while lording it over the Saxons. An event at last occurred which scarcely any one would have foreseen or have guarded against, and which reads more like a drunken frolic, or a common street brawl, than the grave record of history, although it ended by embittering the feelings of the Saxons against the Normans, and was another of those almost invisible steps which eventually led to the conquest of England. Amongst the foreigners who came to pay their court at this time to the king of England, was Eustace, count of Boulogne, who had married a sister of Edward, but whether maid or widow at the time of her union with the French count, is not very clearly made out; nor is it recorded whether she was the daughter of Emma of Normandy, though she laid claim to Ethelred as her father. Eustace, proud to claim such a relationship, whatever it might be, mounted the two slips of feathered whalebone in his helmet, and with a showy train of followers visited the English court, where he and his retinue were hospitably entertained by Edward. Here he met with Normans and French who spoke nearly the same language as himself, and there is but little doubt that such an assembly did not fail to show their contempt for everything that was Saxon, voting vulgar a court in which a cowherd had risen to the rank of earl; and probably extolling their own ancestry, who, time out of mind, had been brought up to the more "polite" profession of murder and robbery both by sea and land. While returning on his visit from Edward, he commanded his train to halt before they entered Dover, and putting on his coat of mail, ordered his followers to do the same; and thus armed, they entered the town. They then commenced riding up and down the streets, insulting the inhabitants, and selecting the best houses in which to take up their quarters for the night; for such had been the custom of the Danes, who made the houses of the Saxons their inns, sometimes permitting, as a great favour, the owner and his family to share the meal which they had compelled them to provide. It is pretty clear that the deeds of these "good old times" had furnished the topic of conversation amongst the visitors at the Saxon court, made up as it would be of Normans and Northmen, and descendants of the Vikings, who now found it dangerous to follow the "honourable" employment of their ancestors—men who mourned over the changes which no longer allowed them with impunity to insult the wife and daughter of

the Saxon, whom they compelled to be their host—to eat the meal which they forced him to provide, and for which they considered they made him an ample return if they did not stab him upon his own hearth, and then set fire to his house. These cruel and bloody deeds, which had been counted valorous, had often, doubtless, furnished the midnight conversation of the cruel sea-kings, as they congregated around their fire, seated upon—

“A dismal circle
Of Druid stones upon the forlorn moor,
Where the chill rain began at shut of eve
In dull November; and their chancel-vault
The heaven itself was blinded through the night.”—KEATS.

Alas! such horrors were again to be renewed; though there were but few at this time who foresaw the storm which was now slowly heaving up, and was ere long doomed to burst with renewed fury upon England.

While the French count and his followers were prancing through the streets of Dover, full, perhaps, of the thoughts of such scenes as we have faintly pictured, one of them alighted upon the threshold of a sturdy Saxon, who, considering his house was his castle, refused to allow the insulting foreigner to enter. The Frenchman or Norman instantly drew his sword and wounded the Saxon, who in his turn slew the aggressor. The count and his followers attacked the Englishman, and put him to death upon his own hearth. All Dover was instantly in arms, for the foreigners now rode through the town sword in hand, striking at all they came near, and trampling every one they could ride over under the hoofs of their horses. They were at last met by an armed body of the townsmen. A severe combat took place, and it was not until nineteen of his followers were slain, that the count of Boulogne took flight with all the speed he could; and not venturing to embark, he hastened back, with such of his train as remained, to the court of the English king.

Edward at once forgave his brother-in-law, and, on his bare assertion, believed that the inhabitants of Dover were wholly to blame; he then sent for earl Godwin, within whose governorship Dover was included, and ordered him without delay to attack the town, and punish all who had risen up in arms against the count of Boulogne and his followers. But the Saxon earl was loath to appear in arms against his countrymen on the

mere report of a stranger, and reasonably enough suggested that the whole affair should be investigated by competent judges; "for it ill becomes you," replied Godwin, "to condemn without a hearing the men whom it is your duty to protect." Urged on by the clamours of his favourites, Edward insisted upon immediate vengeance being executed upon the inhabitants of Dover; and when the Saxon earl refused to fulfil his commands, he then cited him to appear before the council at Gloucester, where the court was then held. Godwin was well acquainted with the characters who would preside at the court before which he was summoned, and well knew that, right or wrong, sentence of banishment would be proclaimed against him, as it consisted chiefly of Normans, who were his sworn enemies, and who would not hesitate, by any means, to lessen the power he possessed: so, seeing the foreign enemies that were arrayed against him, and the unfair trial that awaited him, he resolved to overthrow this corrupt court by an appeal to arms, and, without offering any violence to the king, rescue both himself and England from the "cunning of the Normans." For as an old writer observes, while describing the events which preceded and were followed by those which took place about this period, "The all-powerful God must have proposed to himself at once two plans of destruction for the English race, and must have framed a sort of military ambuscade against it: for, on one hand, he let loose the Danish invasion; on the other, he created and cemented the Norman alliance; so that, if we escaped the blows aimed at our faces by the Danes, the cunning of the Normans might be at hand to surprise us."

When Godwin refused to be tried by the corrupt and packed court of Gloucester, he commenced assembling his forces together; for he was governor over the whole of the extensive country south of the Thames, and the popularity of his quarrel caused numbers to flock to his standard, as he was now looked up to by the Saxons as the defender of their rights. Harold, his eldest son, also collected a large army from the eastern coast between the Thames and Boston Wash; while Sweyn, his second son, mustered many followers along the banks of the Severn and the frontiers of Wales. The three armies commanded by Godwin and his sons united, and drew up near Gloucester, when the earl sent messengers to the king, demanding that the Count of Boulogne, with his followers, together with

such of the Normans and Frenchmen as had rendered themselves objectionable, should be given up to the justice of the English nation.

Meantime, Edward had not been idle, but had despatched messengers to Siward and Leofric, with orders to muster all the forces they could without loss of time, and during the interval that preceded their arrival, he kept up a seeming negotiation with Godwin; but no sooner did he find himself surrounded by a powerful army, headed by his own chosen leaders, than he refused boldly to give up his Norman and French favourites. But a great and unexpected change had taken place in the spirit of the people; for although Edward had followed that cruel policy which kings have too often had recourse to, that of setting one nation against another, the Danes of Mercia and Northumberland which had marched up under the banners of their earls, when confronted together, refused to make war upon the Saxons. They now considered them as their countrymen—so would not shed their blood for Edward and his foreign favourites; a strong proof how popular the cause was which Godwin had taken up; whilst neither the Saxon nor Danish chiefs would draw their swords in such a quarrel.

When on neither side parties could be found who were willing to shed each other's blood, peace was at once agreed upon, and it was decided that the dispute should be investigated by an assembly in London. Hostages and oaths were exchanged, both swearing to maintain the peace of God, and perfect friendship. On the side of Edward this solemn promise does not appear to have been sincere, as he availed himself of the interval between taking the oath and the appointed time on which the assembly was to take place, in levying a powerful army from every available source, and in nearly every instance giving the command of the various troops to his Norman and French favourites. This immense army was quartered in and around London, so that the appointed council was held in the very heart of a strongly fortified camp, the leaders of which were the enemies of Godwin. Before this council Godwin and his sons were summoned to appear without an escort, and unarmed. The earl, in return, demanded that hostages should be given for their safety; for he well knew that they had but few friends in the council. Edward refused to furnish hostages, or to guarantee their safety either in coming or going;

and after having been twice or thrice summoned, and refused the unconditional terms of surrender, sentence of banishment was pronounced against earl Godwin and his sons, and only five days allowed them to quit England, with all their family. Even before the expiration of that period, king Edward, instigated doubtless by his favourites, who thirsted both for the blood and the estates of the Saxon earl, ordered a troop of horse to pursue the banished nobleman and his family, but the command of the party was fortunately entrusted to a Saxon, who was in no hurry to overtake them. Godwin, with his wife, and three of his sons, Sweyn, Tostig, and Gurth, with such treasure as they could amass, sailed for Flanders, and were kindly received by earl Baldwin; while Harold and Leofwin, his other sons, embarked from Bristol, and escaped into Ireland. All their broad lands were confiscated; the high situations they had held were given to the Norman favourites; the castles they had inhabited, with all they contained, fell into the hands of their enemies; and Godwin found himself, in his old age, and after a busy life spent in the service of courts and camps, but little richer than, when a humble cowherd, he led Ulfr through wild forest paths to the Danish camp.

Editha the queen was now left alone in the midst of her father's enemies; nor was she long before she felt the weight of their hatred and vengeance. "It was not right," the Norman favourites said, "that while her family was in exile, she herself should sleep upon down." She was also deprived of all the possessions which on her marriage had been bequeathed to her by her father, and then shut up in a nunnery. Calm and passionless as an historian ought ever to be, he would scarcely feel any regret if the Norman invasion had taken place in the life-time of such a weak-minded monarch as this Edward the Confessor, were it only for his conduct to the beautiful and highly-gifted Editha, whose character Ingulphus has so delicately drawn. Still less do we admire the forbearance by which he obtained his much-lauded sanctity, which was but a species of "refined cruelty" towards a lady whose very soul must have been a shrine fit for the purest affection to dwell in. But, after all, we feel a pity for Edward. His life was uncheered either by the affection of father or mother, excepting in the very early years of childhood. As he grew up, he became a prey to false friends and unprincipled priests, who, while they pretended to draw his attention to the

treasures "which neither rust nor moth doth corrupt," were themselves revelling in the very heart of vile and selfish corruption. Ambitious as Godwin might be, there was much more of the nobleness of human nature in his character than existed in the soul of Edward; and, although we feel sorry for the king's weakness, we can never pardon him for leaving that lovely lady alone in the cold grey cloisters of a nunnery, where, to use the words of one of our old chroniclers, she "in tears and prayers expected the day of her release," doubtless looking beyond the grave for that happiness which it was never her lot to know on earth. But we have now arrived at the fall and banishment of earl Godwin, and must leave him for awhile in exile, to glance at the merry doings in the English court during his absence.

CHAPTER XXXV.

EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.

"As I was banished, I was banished,
 But as I come, I come.—
 Will you permit that I shall stand condemned
 A wandering vagabond; my rights and royalties
 Plucked from my arms perforce, and given away
 To upstart spendthrifts?
 What would you have me do? I am a subject,
 And challenge law; attornies are denied me;
 And therefore, personally, I lay my claim
 To my inheritance."—SHAKSPERE.

AFTER the banishment of earl Godwin, the English court must have resembled the joyous uproar which often breaks out in a school during the absence of the master, for the days which followed are described as "days of rejoicing and big in fortune for the foreigners." The dreaded earl in exile—his warlike sons far away from England—and the beautiful queen Editha weeping among the cold cloisters—left nothing more to do but revel in the triumph of the victory thus attained. There was now a Norman archbishop of Canterbury, a Norman bishop of London, and in nearly every fortress a Norman or French governor; and, to crown all, William, duke of Normandy, called

alike the Bastard and the Conqueror, came over with a numerous train to visit king Edward, and to see how matters stood in England. It is difficult to prove now, whether the duke of Normandy was invited by Edward, or came over at the suggestion of his countrymen, "to see how the land lay;" the latter is the more probable; and we can imagine the picture which must have been drawn of England, either in the letter sent, or by the messenger who went over; and how the son of Robert the Devil (for such was the surname his father bore in Normandy) must have smiled at the ascendancy his countrymen had obtained over the weak-minded king of England. We can fancy some such gentleman as the count of Boulogne, full of "smart sayings," recounting how he and his followers "amused" themselves at Dover; and how the few trifling murders they committed were instrumental in driving out the family of Godwin; in a word, that do whatever they might, Edward would stand up to support them, and that they could now ride rough-shod over the Saxons.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary that we should give some account of this new guest; who, either by good fortune, cunning, or valour, changed the whole face of England, and shook into dust the power from which, through a succession of many centuries, had sprung a race of powerful kings.

This William, who will ever bear the proud title of the Conqueror, was the natural son of Robert duke of Normandy, who was nearly allied to Emma, the queen of both Ethelred and Canute, and the mother of Edward. William's mother was the daughter of a tanner, or some one humbly situated in the town of Falaise, and was one day busily engaged in washing clothes at a brook, when the eye of duke Robert chanced to alight upon her as he was returning from hunting. Pleased with her beauty, he sent one of his knights to make proposals to her father, offering no doubt, on pretty liberal terms, to make her his mistress. The father received the proposition coldly, but probably dreading that his daughter might be carried off by force—and our only wonder is that she was not—he went to consult his brother, who is said to have lived in a neighbouring forest, and to have stood high in the estimation of all around for his sanctity. The "pious" brother gave his opinion, and said that in all things it was fitting to obey the will of the prince. So Arlette, or Harlot, as her name is sometimes spelt, was consigned to duke

Robert, who, we must conclude, was already married. Illegitimacy, as we have shown in several reigns, was thought but little of at this period, many of our own Saxon kings having had no better claim to the crown than William had to the dukedom of Normandy. However, Robert the Devil, as he was called from his violent temper, was greatly attached to both the tanner's daughter and the child she bore him, whom he brought up with as much affection as if he had been the son of a lawful wife.*

When William was only seven years old, his father was seized with a fit of devotion, and resolved to make a pilgrimage, on foot, to Jerusalem, to obtain forgiveness for his sins. His chiefs and barons rightly argued that such a journey was not free from danger, and that if he chanced to die, they should be left without a ruler. "By my faith," answered the duke, "I will not leave you without a lord. I have a little bastard, who will grow up and be a gallant man, if it please God. I know he is my son. Receive him, then, as your lord, for I make him my heir, and give him from this time forth the whole duchy of Normandy."

The Norman barons did as duke Robert desired; and placing their hands between the child's, acknowledged him as their ruler. The duke did not live to return from his pilgrimage; and although some opposition was offered to the election of William, and a civil war ensued, the adherents of the bastard were victorious.† Nor was William long before he gave proofs of that daring and valour which form so prominent a feature in his character; he was soon able to buckle on his armour, and mount his war-horse without the aid of the stirrup; and on the day when he first sprang into his saddle without assistance, the veterans who had drawn their swords in defence of his claim to the dukedom made it a day of great rejoicing. Bold, fearless, and determined, and as if resolved to triumph over those who had objected to his election on the ground of his birth, he occasionally issued his commands, and put forth his charter with the bold beginning that proclaimed his origin, and wrote, "We, William the Bastard, hereby decree, &c." He soon evinced a love for horses and military array, and while yet young made war upon his neighbours of Anjou and Brittany. Nor did he fail to punish those who made any allusion to his birth; although he himself

* William of Malmesbury.

† Thierry's "Norman Conquest," p. 134, European Library edition.

at times made a boast of his illegitimacy, yet to none others would he allow that privilege in his hearing without resenting it as an insult; and his vengeance was at times accomplished with the most merciless cruelty. While attacking the town of Alençon, the besieged appeared upon the walls, and beating their shields, which were covered with leather, exclaimed, "Hides! hides!" in allusion to the calling of his mother's father. The cruel Norman immediately ordered the hands and feet of the prisoners he had captured in an attempted sally to be cut off, and thrown over the walls into the town by his slingers. Such was the inhuman act committed by the savage who now came as a spy and a guest to the court of England.

Great must have been the delight of duke William to see, wherever he moved, his own countrymen at the head of the navy and army. If he visited a fortress, a Norman was ready as governor to receive him; if he entered a church, a Norman bishop stood forth to meet him; if he remained in the palace, Norman friends surrounded him; and he heard only the language of his own country spoken, and was acknowledged by all who in England approached him (excepting the king, and a few Saxon chiefs) as their lord and governor. Wherever he moved, he was met by Normans, and bowed down to, as if he had already been England's king; for nearly all the high offices in the kingdom were either in the hands of the Norman or French favourites. What secret consultations he had with his friends, what notes were made on the strength of the fortresses, the safest roads, the best landing places, is not recorded, although it is evident that the Norman duke had already fixed his eye upon the crown of England, and but waited for a favourable pretext to seize upon it.

Edward, beyond doubt, received his cousin William kindly, perhaps more so than he had done any other Norman; for all his affections seemed planted in the land where he had spent the years of his youth; beside, William's father had been kind to him and his brother Alfred, when they had no friends in England whom they knew of. Nor could William well allude to the English throne becoming vacant on the death of Edward, nor deplore that he left no son behind to reign in his stead, for Edward, the son of his half-brother, Edmund Ironside, was still alive; so William wisely held his peace, and left all to time and chance—taking care to watch both. Previous to his return, Edward presented him with arms, horses, dogs, and falcons, loaded his

attendants with presents, and gave the duke every proof of his sincere affection. After his departure, the Norman favourites became more arrogant than ever; for there is but little doubt that they now began to look upon England as their own, and but waited for the death of the weak-minded king, and the return of duke William, to take possession. All this seems secretly and silently to have been arranged. These plans, however, were for a time doomed to be frustrated. Earl Godwin and his powerful sons were still alive, and making such preparations as the court parasites had never dreamed of for returning to England, and avenging themselves upon their enemies. Still, the cunning of duke William failed him not. Chances favoured him; and we seem as we were now about to weave and unweave the web of a wild romance, instead of recounting the truthful events of history.

Yet, in the great drama which we are about to open, popes, and crowned kings, and mitred bishops, princes, and priests, are the actors; and the prize contended for is that England which now claims the proud title of "Queen of the World"—that little island which has dwarfed ancient Rome and classic Greece by its gigantic grandeur.

Earl Godwin during his exile had not remained idle; he had still a few friends in England who would take care to acquaint him with all that was going on at court. Here and there a Saxon had also managed to retain the command of a fortress, and but few of his countrymen now remained that were not heartily disgusted with the arrogance and tyranny of the Norman favourites. Such wealth as Godwin had carried out with him, or been able to muster, he had made good use of; and having got together a powerful fleet, he, in the summer of 1052, ventured once more upon the English court. He had taken the precaution to despatch faithful emissaries before him, and thousands of the Saxons and Danes had sworn an oath, that they would take up arms, and "fight until death for earl Godwin." His first attack was not very successful; for although he managed to elude the fleet, which was commanded by his enemies the Normans, he was at last discovered, pursued, and compelled to shelter in the Pevensey Roads. A tempest arose while Godwin lay at anchor, and dispersed the royal fleet.

Near the Isle of Wight he was joined by his sons, Harold and Leofwin, who had returned from Ireland, and brought with

them both men and ships—a clear proof that Godwin had carefully arranged his plans. Wherever the Saxon fleet now moved along the coast they met with a warm welcome; wherever they chose to land, armed bands appeared, and joined with them; the peasants brought in stores of provisions; and the name of earl Godwin was again proclaimed with as much heartiness and sincerity as when he alone dared to beard the Norman favourites in the palace—the current of popularity had every way set in his favour. Part of his forces he landed at Sandwich, then daringly doubled the North Foreland, and sailed like a conqueror up the Thames, to the very foot of the grey wave-washed wall where Edmund and Canute had carried on the struggle, when London was besieged and defended. What a buzzing there would again be in the old city throughout all that summer night! what whispering in the secret corners of the old-fashioned streets! for Godwin had managed to land many of his followers, and they had friends on shore, and appointed places of meeting and passwords, by which they could recognise each other in the dark; and arms would be seen glancing, half concealed by short Saxon and Danish cloaks, and treason be as rife in every hole-and-corner as it ever was in any of the centuries which have since elapsed. From the royal army, troops were deserting every hour, and all around the coast, and up the Thames, the ships that were sent out to oppose him turned round their heads, and either willingly, or through fear, followed in his wake, and, instead of becoming enemies, strengthened his formidable fleet.

Before a blow was struck by his impatient followers, Godwin sent a respectful message to the king, requesting the revision of the sentence which had been passed against him, and demanding a restitution of his property and honours; in return for which he promised to become a true and faithful subject in all duty to the king. Edward refused the proffered submission, though every hour saw his forces thinned, and, with the exception of his foreigners, those who remained appeared unwilling to fight. Other messengers were despatched to Edward, for Godwin was reluctant to employ the large force under his command against the weak and wavering followers of the king, whose numerical strength bore no comparison to his own; for he clearly saw that, if his army would but have the patience to wait, he should obtain a bloodless victory; it was, however, with great difficulty that he could restrain them, so eager were they to be

revenged on the Normans. Nor were the latter at all backward in urging Edward to commence the attack, for they well knew that concession on the king's part would be their ruin, while, in the chances of a fight, Godwin might probably be killed, or if even victorious there would be something for all who ventured into such a scramble. But the few ships which Edward had drawn up above London-bridge could not be depended on; the king knew that a battle on his part was a hopeless affair, yet still he remained unbending and obstinate. There were still a few Saxon nobles true to Edward; they were of those whose ancestors had followed Alfred, and Athelstan, and Ethelred through good and through evil report; and who, like the nobles that have for centuries succeeded them, resolved to remain true subjects while ever one sat upon the throne in whose veins the blood of Hengist or Horsa flowed. To such as these in the hour of real danger Edward was still wise enough to listen. He for once disregarded the advice of his Norman favourites, and leaving Stigand, his bishop, to act as president, permitted the Saxon chiefs who belonged to his own party to meet those who came over in the favour of earl Godwin, with the mutual intention of effecting a reconciliation. Where both parties were anxious for peace, there was but little probability of a war; this the Normans saw, and well knew that there was not a moment to be lost. And now our old English chroniclers fairly lose themselves in the feelings of delight with which they describe the hasty departure of the Norman favourites. Never before was there amongst them such packing and saddling! at every little portal-gate they were seen sallying out of London; in his hurry to escape, the Norman archbishop of Canterbury left behind his pallium. Stigand found it, threw it over his own shoulders, and on the strength of the sanctity which it was supposed to contain, set up archbishop on his own account. Some galloped off and left all their effects behind, glad to get to the seaside at any price, and to creep into little dirty fishing-boats, filled with "ancient smells," and there concealing themselves, crept over to the opposite coast as speedily as possible. Others, following the example set them on a former occasion by Eustace of Boulogne, trampled underfoot the children that were playing in the summer twilight in the streets of London, and thus slew by proxy earl Godwin's Saxons, for of such metal were these foreign favourites made of. We can picture the Saxon wives of that day picking

up their dead and wounded children, and cursing the cowards as the thunder of their horses' hoofs died away in the dim distance.

The witena-gemot again assembled in London for the trial of earl Godwin; the balance of power was this time in his own hands—there were no Norman enemies to fear—and the Saxon boldly defended himself; his sons also showed that they were justified in acting as they had done, and “all the great men and chiefs of the country,” before whom they appeared, were satisfied. The sentence of banishment was recalled; their honours and estates restored; and it was then decreed that all the Normans should be banished from England, as “promoters of discord, enemies of peace, and calumniators of the English to their king.” A son and grandson of Godwin's were then given up to Edward as hostages; and, for better security, the king sent them over to duke William of Normandy—these we shall have to return to again as our plot deepens, and we draw nearer to the end of the bloody tragedy which ended in the destruction of the Saxons. Editha left her convent, and the family of earl Godwin were once more triumphant at the English court. An exception was made to one of the old earl's sons, named Sweyn, not for the part he had taken in ousting the Norman favourites, but for offences of a graver nature. He, however, became penitent, donned a pilgrim's garb, walked barefooted to Jerusalem, and died, as Robert the Devil had done before him, on his way home.

A few exceptions of but little note were made to this decree of banishment against the Normans; the archbishop, who had run away without his pallium, was restored; and a few others, who appear to have stood aloof from the quarrels fomented by their countrymen, or who, at least, had the tact to steer clear of open danger, were, at the intercession of Edward, permitted to remain in England.

We have attempted a sketch of the English court after the exile of Godwin's family—of the joy and triumph that reigned in Edward's palace: the picture reversed must have presented a faithful representation of the rage and hatred of the Normans, when, after their hasty flight, they again assembled at duke William's court. What raving and storming must there have been amongst the disappointed courtiers, what a stamping of armed feet and dropping of sabres, as they swore what they would do if ever they met the Saxon earl in arms! Above all,

what curses loud and deep must have been vented against Godwin and all his family! We can picture duke William biting his lip, and walking moodily apart, until the two hostages arrived; and then his cunning eye would brighten for a moment, as he felt he had still a hold, though but a slender one, upon the weak-minded monarch of England.

Godwin, who was now an old man, did not long survive his triumph. The account of his death is given in various ways by the old chroniclers. It appears to have taken place at the Easter festival, in the year 1053; and although not so sudden as some of the monkish writers have described it to be, the earl never rallied again from the hour when he first fainted at the banquet table in the presence of the king. One of the servants, while in the act of pouring out a cup of wine, stumbled with one foot, and would have fallen but for the dexterity with which he advanced the other. Godwin raised his eyes, and, smiling, said to the king, "The brother has come to assist the brother." "Ay," answered Edward, looking with a deep meaning on the Saxon chief, "brother needs brother, and would to God mine still lived!" "Oh, king," exclaimed Godwin, "why is it that, on the slightest recollection of your brother, you always look so angrily on me? If I contributed even indirectly to his death, may the God of heaven grant that this piece of bread may choke me!" Godwin put the bread in his mouth, say the authors who relate this anecdote, and was immediately strangled. His death, however, was not so sudden; for, falling from his seat, he was carried out by his two sons, Tostig and Gurth, and expired five days after. But the account of this event varies, according as the writer is of Norman or English race. "I ever see before me two roads, two opposite versions," says an historian of less than a century later; "I warn my readers of the peril in which I find myself."*

Siward, the chief of Northumberland, who had at first followed the royal party against the Saxon earl, but eventually assisted in expelling the foreign favourites, expired soon after Godwin. He was by birth a Dane, and the population of the same origin over whom he ruled gave him the title of Siward-Digr, Siward the Strong; a rock of granite was long shown, which he is said to have split with one blow of his axe. Feeling

* Thierry's "Norman Conquest."

his end approach, he said to those who surrounded him, "Raise me up, and let me die like a soldier, and not huddled together like a cow; put me on my coat of mail, place my helmet on my head, my shield on my left arm, and my gilt axe in my right hand, that I may expire in arms." Siward left one son, named Waltheof, who being too young to succeed to his government, it was given to Tostig, Godwin's third son. Harold, who was the eldest son, succeeded Godwin to the government south of the Thames; and Edward showed more kindness to the son than he had ever done to the father, for on him there rested no suspicion connected with the death of Alfred, a subject which was ever settling down like a dark cloud upon the sunniest moments that Godwin and Edward enjoyed. Harold was the most gifted of all Godwin's sons, and soon became as popular with the people as his father; having, moreover, no enemies in the court,—for to such favourites as the king wished to retain Harold offered no opposition; nor was it necessary, for Edward was now fast verging into dotage; his intellect, which, at best, was never very brilliant, now became clouded, and he passed a greater portion of his time amongst his priests. No one ever sat upon the Saxon throne worse adapted to play the part of a king than Edward the Confessor; he was not cut out for the rough business of this work-a-day world. To a peasant who once offended him, he said, "I would hurt you if I were able;" an exclamation, as Sharon Turner observes, "which almost implies imbecility."

For some time there was a dispute between Harold and Algar, the son of Leofric, the governor of Mercia. Godwin, on succeeding to the earldom, had either voluntarily, or at the request of Edward, given up the command of East Anglia to Algar; but no sooner did Harold find himself in full power, than he compelled the son of Leofric to give up the governorship, and, accusing him of treason, made war upon him. Nothing daunted by his first defeat, Algar went into Wales, and obtaining assistance of Griffith, one of the Welsh kings, and mustering many powerful allies amongst his own connexions, he returned, ravaged Hereford, burnt the abbey, and slew several priests; and Raulf, who commanded the garrison, being a Norman, rather encouraged than opposed the ravages of Algar. It is said that he caused the Saxons to fight on horseback, a mode of warfare to which they were unaccustomed. But Harold was not

long before arriving at the scene of action, when he soon defeated Algar and his Welsh allies, driving them back into their mountain fastnesses, and, it is said, compelling the Welsh chiefs to swear that they would never again pass the frontier of Wales. Harold granted the prisoners he had taken their lives, on the condition that the oath was kept, while on his part he solemnly vowed, that if a Welshman was taken in arms on the English side of Offa's-dyke, he should have his right hand cut off. To Algar these terms extended not, and Harold was at last compelled to negotiate with him, and restore him to his former dignities. Meantime Tostig but succeeded indifferently in the governorship of Northumbria. Siward, who had so long had the command over them, was himself a Dane; and as the inhabitants of the North, with but few exceptions, were of Danish origin, they took a dislike to the son of Godwin. He imposed heavy taxes upon them, violated their ancient privileges, and seems, in fact, to have rendered himself as unpopular as the Norman governors had ever been with the Saxons. Worn down by oppression, the Anglo-Danes at last rebelled, attacked the city of York, in which the chief residence of Tostig stood, and put many of his principal followers to death, amongst whom were several of their own countrymen. Although Tostig escaped, and the Danes seized upon his treasures, they rested not satisfied with such a victory, but assembling a great council they pronounced sentence of banishment against him, and elected Morkar, one of the sons of Algar, governor in his stead. Morkar took the command of the rebel army, and drove Tostig into Mercia; he was also strengthened by the Welsh force, who, led on by his brother Edward, had, in despite of their oath, once more ventured across Offa's-dyke in arms. The old feeling was not yet dead amongst the ancient Cymry, who seem to have been as eager as ever they were before time to fight against the Saxons.

There is considerable confusion in the time and dates of these attacks upon the Welsh, by Harold and his brother Tostig, and it is difficult to separate one invasion from the other, although it seems evident that the Welsh king, Griffith, fell in the latter, and that his head was sent to Harold. But though the Welsh were defeated, terms of negotiation were entered into with the Anglo-Danes. Harold required of them to state their grievances. They did; and boldly told him that his brother's tyranny was the cause of their appearing in arms. Harold tried to exculpate his brother, and promised that he should rule better for the

future, if they would again accept him as their governor. They refused. "We were born free," said one of the Danish leaders, "and brought up free. a haughty chief is insupportable to us; we will, like our ancestors, live or die free. We have no other answer to give to the king." Harold not only delivered the message, but dissuaded Edward from protracting the war, and on his return ratified their rights with his own signature, as representative of the king; sanctioning the election of the son of Algar, and the rejection of his brother. Tostig, in a rage, departed to Flanders to his father-in-law, vowing vengeance against Harold and his countrymen.

As the tax called Peter-pence began to fail, so did the friendship of the church of Rome towards England abate; there was no longer any law in existence to enforce the payment, all that was sent over being a voluntary contribution. It was then that the mother church began to complain of simony being practised in England, of Saxon bishops who had purchased their sees; not that the church of Rome was herself guiltless of such transactions, but that she objected to a system in which she partook not of the profits. The storm first broke over the head of Eldred, archbishop of York, who, when he went to Rome to solicit the pallium, was refused, and it was only through the interference of a Saxon nobleman that he at last obtained it. Robert, the Norman archbishop of Canterbury, had again been driven from his see by the Saxons; and Stigand, who had before snatched up the pallium, which the archbishop had left behind in his eagerness to escape, again officiated in the place of the banished primate. But Robert this time flew to Rome, and there branded the Saxon bishop as an usurper. The result was, that the archbishop returned with a letter from the pontiff, commanding Stigand to resign. But before Robert reached England another pope had been chosen by the principal Roman families, and to Benedict the Saxon bishop appealed, who granted him permission to wear the pallium. The election of Benedict was the signal for an army to advance upon Italy, and enforce another election which the king of Germany approved of. Two popes could not reign; the last was victorious. Benedict was defeated, and excommunicated, and the pallium he had given to Stigand was now useless. Had Benedict been victorious, it would have been as good a pallium as ever pontiff blessed; packed up, and despatched from the eternal city, as it was, "it was a thing of naught."

Trifling, as matters of history, as such petty squabbles must appear, they, nevertheless, had their weight and influence—widening the breach which had already been made between the church of Rome and England; and when the time arrived, and the vindictive mother saw the opportunity of striking a blow effectually, she did so, and brought all the power she possessed to aid William the Norman when he attacked England. Norman Robert and Saxon Stigand, though but feathers floating in the air, showed unerringly that the wind which blew from Rome was unfavourable to the interests of England. While Britain also seemed drifting away daily wider and further from Rome, William of Normandy was still drawing nearer to the eternal city, and constantly seeking its favour and protection. Alexander the Second, who had driven out and excommunicated the anti-pope, Benedict, had refused to sanction duke William's marriage with Matilda, a refusal which was countenanced by the learned monk, Lanfranc, then resident at the Norman court. Although the fiery duke dared not do more than murmur at the opposition of the pontiff, which was grounded on the near relationship of William to Matilda, still he was resolved not to brook the reproaches of Lanfranc, much as he valued the monk as a councillor; so he banished him from his court. Lanfranc went to Rome, grew in favour with the new pope, and, instead of resenting William's harsh treatment, the monk obtained from the pontiff a dispensation. Alexander the Second acknowledged the marriage of William of Normandy and Matilda, and Lanfranc was the bearer of the good tidings to the Norman court. Who so grateful as duke William—who so highly honoured as the monk, Lanfranc, the man who had more power over the pontiff than the duke himself? Who so blind, that he cannot see the chain which now reached from Normandy to Rome—the links, William, Lanfranc, and all the friends of the pope? We must bear in mind that on every mount in Normandy were perched those ill-omened birds of prey, who were wetting their beaks, and looking with hungry eyes towards England, from which they had been driven by Godwin and his sons, just as they were about to gorge themselves. On the coast of France, also, many a disappointed cormorant might be seen, looking eagerly in the same direction.

About this period, Edward sent over to Hungary for his nephew, the son of Edmund Ironside, who must by this time have been a man far advanced in years, as Edmund himself

died about 1016, and it seems to have been some time between the year 1057 and 1060, when Edward the son of Edmund arrived in England, at the invitation of his uncle. It appears to have been the intention of Edward the Confessor to have appointed his nephew Edward successor to the throne of England; but this was prevented by the death of the son of Edmund Ironside. Dark hints are thrown out respecting the death of this prince, and Harold is hinted at as having hastened his end; but there seems to be no solid ground for such suspicion, and the rumour was probably circulated by the Normans, whom Edward still retained, and who were envious of the power the son of Godwin had acquired. There still remained Edgar, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, and the son of Edward, who died soon after his arrival in England; but the king does not appear to have turned his eyes towards him as his successor.

As the end of Edward the Confessor draws nigh, our attention is divided between William of Normandy and earl Harold, the son of Godwin; and as we may consider the king as already dead, for his name scarcely appears again, unless as connected with the events which succeeded his death, we will leave him to his devotions, and take up the clue which leads us through the dark labyrinths to the gloomy end of this portion of our history. The clearest light which has been thrown upon the mysteries of this period, and the best reason given for Harold's visit to Norway, will be found in the following extract from Thierry's "Norman Conquest:"—

"For two years internal peace had reigned in England without interruption. The animosity of king Edward to the sons of Godwin disappeared from want of aliment, and from the habit of constantly being with them. Harold, the new chief of this popular family, fully rendered to the king that respect and deferential submission of which he was so tenacious. Some ancient histories tell us that Edward loved and treated him as his own son; but, at all events, he did not feel towards him that aversion mingled with fear with which Godwin had ever inspired him; and he had now no longer any pretext for retaining, as guarantees against the son, the two hostages whom he had received from the father. It will be remembered that these hostages had been confided by the suspicious Edward to the care of the duke of Normandy. They had, for more than ten years, been far from their country, in a sort of captivity. Towards the end of the year 1065, Harold, their brother, and their uncle,

deeming the moment favourable for obtaining their deliverance, asked permission of the king to go and demand them in his name, and bring them out of exile. Without showing any repugnance to release the hostages, Edward appeared greatly alarmed at the project which Harold had formed of going in person to Normandy. ‘I will not compel you to stay,’ said he; ‘but if you go, it will be without my consent; for your journey will certainly bring some evil upon yourself and upon your country. I know duke William and his crafty mind; he hates you, and will grant you nothing unless he gain greatly by it; the only way safely to obtain the hostages from him were to send some one else.’”

Harold, however, went, in spite of this friendly warning, with his hawk on his wrist, and his hounds baying at his heels, hunting and hawking on his way, until he arrived at Bosham in Sussex, where he quietly embarked with his followers to visit William, duke of Normandy, and fetch back his brother and nephew. We must now follow the perilous footsteps of earl Harold, and for a short period draw the attention of our readers to duke William and the court of Normandy.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

EARL HAROLD'S VISIT TO NORMANDY.

“RICHARD.

——— Now do I play the touch,
To try if thou be current gold, indeed:—
Edward lives:—Think now what I would speak.

BUCKINGHAM. Say on, my loving lord.

RICHARD. I say I would be king—”

WE have already given what we believe to be the real motive of Harold's visit to Normandy. That he went at the request of Edward to announce the king's intention of appointing William as his successor, the incidents which we shall record, on Harold's arrival, clearly disprove; for if such were the case, what occasion would there have been for the duke to entrap the son of Godwin into taking the oath on the relics as he did?

The Saxon earl had not been long out at sea before a contrary wind arose; and after buffeting about for some time, he was at last driven upon the opposite coast of France, near the mouth of the river Somme, and upon the territory which was then held by Guy, count of Ponthieu. Adhering to the maxims of the old sea-kings, the count considered all his own that he either found upon the ocean or picked up along the coast; so he seized Harold and his followers, and held them prisoners until they could pay the ransom he demanded. The captives were taken to the fortress of Beaurain, near Montreuil. Harold communicated with William of Normandy, and the latter speedily sent messengers demanding the release of the prisoners, under the plea that they were sent on matters of business to his own court, and, for that reason, he was bound to protect them. The duke is said to have accompanied his message with a menace. This the count paid no regard to, and William, who had many reasons for keeping on good terms with his French neighbours, was too wary to execute the threat he had thrown out; so he paid the ransom, and liberated Harold, whom he was anxious to have in his own possession.

When the Saxon earl reached Rouen, William received him with an apparent warmth, and a cordiality, that looked as if he had some end to obtain. He overwhelmed him with kindness, declared that the hostages were his, and might accompany him back at once; but, as a courteous guest, he trusted Harold would remain a few days with him, visit the country, and join in the festivals which he had prepared for his welcome. It would have required a clearer-sighted and more suspicious man than earl Harold appears to have been, to have seen into duke William's motives through all this professed friendship; but the Saxon's eyes were opened at last; William did not lead him from castle to castle for nothing; he well knew the price he had fixed upon the knighthood he conferred upon Harold, and never was a glittering sword, a silver baldric, and a bannered lance, purchased more dearly than those the son of Godwin received from the son of Robert the Devil. Harold went gaily with his brother and nephew to war against the Bretons, at William's request; the Saxons distinguished themselves by their valour, and no one was praised more in the camp than Harold the Saxon, who, with his own hand, had saved several Norman soldiers when they were nigh perishing amongst the quicksands of Coësnon.

While the war lasted, it is recorded that William and Harold slept in the same tent, and ate at the same table. This was the first act of the drama in which William played so masterly a part.

The curtain again draws up, and we behold the duke and the earl riding lovingly side by side on their way to the castle of Bayeux. William begins to talk about his youthful days, of the happy hours he had spent with Edward of England, when he was in Normandy; no doubt he mentioned some of their boyish pranks, told anecdotes that drew a peal of laughter from the unsuspecting Saxon, when all at once he said, "When Edward and I lived under the same roof, like two brothers, he promised me, that if ever he became king of England, he would make me heir to his kingdom." No doubt the son of Robert the Devil looked down upon his saddle-bow, or out of the corner of his keen cunning eye, or threw off the sentence as if he had no meaning in it; then made some passing remarks upon his horse, or any object near at hand. After he had done speaking, Harold, it appears, was taken by surprise, and either made no reply, or merely uttered some such unmeaning word as "indeed!" when William, having ventured one foot upon the ice, tried the other, and thus proceeded: "Harold, if thou wouldst aid me in realising this promise, be sure that if I obtain the kingdom, whatever thou askest of me that shalt thou have."

Harold, be it remembered, was in the enemy's country, surrounded by those who had ever been foes to his family; his brother and nephew were also, like himself, in duke William's power; and there cannot be a doubt but that, if he had openly declared himself opposed to the duke's views, neither he nor they would again have set foot upon the shores of England. The Saxon had no alternative but to appear to acquiesce to his wishes, though we can fancy with what an ill grace he seemed to comply. It was the armed ruffian alone with the victim in his power, who, thinking that he can borrow more than he shall get by murdering his companion, boldly asks for the loan, and, having through fear extorted the promise, presents a bond, gets it signed, then appoints the time and place where it is to be paid; and should the victim seek to evade the responsibility which self-preservation alone compelled him to incur, the other upbraids him as a perjurer and a villain, proclaims to the world what he has done, and gets the consent of all his creditors, who

hoped to be enriched by the loan, to assist in murdering the helpless and unfortunate wretch he has entrapped.

Having extracted something like a vague promise, William then presented the bond, and said, "Since thou consentest to serve me, thou must engage to fortify Dover castle, to dig there a well of fresh water, and deliver it up, when the time comes, to my people. Thou must also give thy sister in marriage to one of my barons" (Did he mean queen Editha?) "and thyself marry my daughter, Adeliza; moreover, on thy departure, thou must leave me, as guarantee for thy promise, one of the two hostages thou claimest, and I will restore him to thee in England when I come there as king."*

So far the wily Norman duke had succeeded, and he was now resolved to make assurance doubly sure. In both instances he had won. And now we see the third act of this "eventful history" revealing duke William seated upon his throne in the castle of Bayeux; he is surrounded by his nobles. Harold, who is ushered into his presence, has not a friend amongst the number. William does not yet want "his pound of flesh;" but he is resolved to test the validity of the bond he has possessed himself of. He objects not to the signature, but wishes others to be witness that it is the handwriting of Harold—this admitted, he is willing to await the time of payment, and lock it up in that great iron-safe—his heart. Not content with living witnesses, this ancient Shylock summoned the dead to add solemnity to the oath he was about to administer. Had the bones of Godwin been in Normandy, there is but little doubt William would have dug them up as dumb witnesses. They were not; so he collected all the bones of the reputed saints that could be found in the neighbouring churches. He summoned the priests to strip their shrines; a bone or a body was all one to William; a tooth or a toe-nail came not amiss to the Norman—all were emptied into the great vessel he had prepared for their reception; and how each church would pick out its own again concerned not the son of Robert the Devil.

"Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips;
Finger of birth-strangled babe,
Ditch-delivered by a drab."

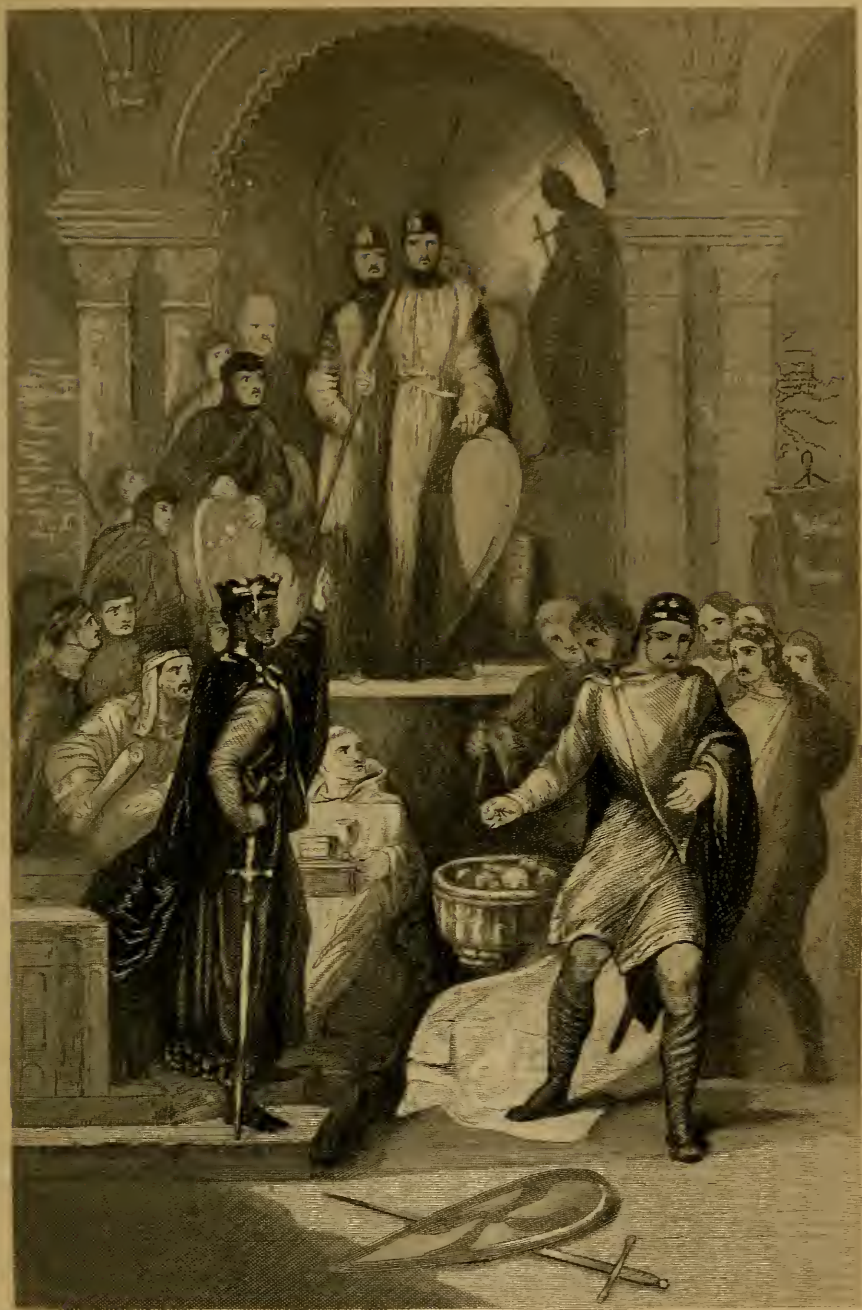
So that "the charm was firm and good," was all the duke cared

* Thierry's "Norman Conquest," vol. i. p. 148.

for; and when the relics were ready, the unsuspecting Saxon earl was called in. How the Norman thieves, who had been kicked out of England, and been witness to what was prepared and covered carefully up against Harold's coming, must have grinned when they saw the son of Godwin enter. William sat upon a throne, holding a drawn sword in his hand. A crucifix was placed upon the cloth of gold that covered the relics, and concealed them entirely from the eyes of Harold; the whole formed, no doubt, to resemble a table, when the duke, bowing to the Saxon, began thus: "Harold, I require of thee, before this noble assembly, to confirm by oath the promises thou hast made to me, to aid me to obtain the kingdom of England after the death of Edward, to marry my daughter Adeliza, and to send thy sister, that I may wed her to one of my barons." Harold swore to do all—he had no alternative—so he "grinned and bided his time," no more meaning to keep his promise than a man would to send a fifty pound note by return of post to the address of the ruffian who had met him on a lonely moor at midnight, and presented a pistol to his ear. When Harold had sworn, the assembled nobles exclaimed, "God aid him!" The third act was then over, and again the curtain fell; the figure of William was seen near the foot-lights, the cloth of gold lying at his feet, and Harold looking on the relics on which he had unconsciously sworn. Well might the Saxon shudder. William had shown himself worthy of the name his father had borne. We want but the thunder and the lightning, the red fire and the grey spirits, to outdo all that the presiding genius of scenic horrors ever invented. Were not the motives so deep, devilish, and villanous, we might sit as spectators, and enjoy the horrors; but when we know that the whole was real—that the motive was serious—that the death's head and cross bones were real representatives of the red warm human blood that was doomed to flow, ere the terrible tragedy ended; we turn away, like Harold, pale and trembling; and as we retreat, we look round in affright, and are still followed by the skeletons of the dead.

From a land filled with such plots and pitfalls, Harold was glad to escape under any promise or at any price, and though he brought away his nephew with him, he was compelled to leave his younger brother in the hands of the Norman.

The duke of Normandy was a man who boggled at nothing, so



Harold swearing on the Relics of the Saints.

long as it aided him in accomplishing his ends. Whether he attempted to win a kingdom or a wife, he considered all means fair that he could avail himself of. Thus, after having for some time courted Matilda, daughter of Baldwin, earl of Flanders, and found himself objected to by the father on account of his birth, and by the maiden because she was already in love with another, he hit upon the strangest stratagem that a lover ever had recourse to, to make his way into a fair lady's affections. Weary of sighing and suing, of continued entreaty which was only met by successive rejections, he resolved boldly to win the inner fortress by battering down the outward walls, and carrying by force that citadel, the lady's heart, which he had so long besieged. Any other lover would have been content with carrying off his fair captive. Duke William acted very differently. He began by beating his prisoner into compliance, leaving it to herself to decide between another thrashing and surrendering at once; neither did he take her in her dishabille, but waited until the lady was very neatly attired; and lest he should kill her in the strange way he took of displaying his affection, he first permitted her to attend mass. This over, he began his suit in downright earnest. He waylaid her in the street of Bruges, and after rolling her very lovingly in the dirt, and making her, as a lady might say, a perfect fright, he then by way of finish, and as a proof of the strength of his affection, administered to her a few good solid hearty cuffs, and without either stopping to pick her up or wishing her good-bye, he mounted his horse and galloped off. This new mode of wooing had its desired effect. Matilda had often been threatened by Love, but never before had he visited her in such a substantial shape. She little dreamed that the fluttering of his purple pinions after such soft hoverings, and gentle breathings, would end in downright hard blows from his clenched fists, but finding such was the case, she went home, rubbed her bruises, changed her attire, and got married as quickly as possible.

Matilda herself, taking a lesson out of the same book, resolved that the lover who had so long stood between herself and William's affections, should not escape scathless, after what she had suffered for his sake; and, although it was long after her marriage, she obtained possession of the estates of the Saxon nobleman, Brihtric, who had had the misfortune to be sent ambassador to her father's court when she first fell in love with him;

and the pretty tigress, now finding that her claws were full-grown, in revenge for the slight she had endured, and the thrashing she had borne, after having robbed him of all he possessed, threw him into prison, and was the cause of his death. A frail fair maiden, the niece of a Kentish nobleman, whom Matilda suspected of conquering the heart of her husband while he was conquering England, it is believed fared little better in her hands, but that she caused her to be mutilated like Elgiva of old, and either ham-strung her, or slit open the beautiful mouth which had won the Conqueror from his allegiance to his savage lady. For this cruel deed, Matilda is said to have received another beating from her husband, and this time from a bridle which he brought in his hand for the purpose.*

When Harold returned to England, he presented himself before king Edward, and made him acquainted with all that had occurred between duke William and himself in Normandy. The king became pale and pensive, and said, "Did I not forewarn thee that I knew this William, and that thy journey would bring great evils both upon thyself and upon thy nation? Heaven grant that they happen not in my time." These words, which are given both by Eadmar and Roger of Hovedon, although they prove that it was far from the wish of Edward that duke William should be his successor, still leave the matter doubtful, whether or not in his younger years he had rashly promised to leave him the crown at his death. William, however, had already obtained a great advantage. An oath, sworn upon relics, no matter under what circumstances, was sure, if violated, to be visited with the fullest vengeance of the ecclesiastical power; and we have already shown that England at this time was looked upon with an unfavourable eye by the church of Rome. The rumour of the oath which Harold had taken was soon made known in England. "Gloomy reports flew from mouth to mouth; fears and alarms spread abroad, without any positive cause for alarm; predictions were dug up from the graves of the saints of the old time. One of these prophesied calamities such as the Saxons had never experienced since their departure from the banks of the Elbe; another announced the

* Miss Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England*, vol. i. pp. 6, 49, 70. For the love and affection which is said to have existed between William and Matilda, we must refer our readers to the above work, to which we are indebted for these revolting facts.

invasion of a people from France, who would subject the English people, and abase their glory in the dust for ever. All these rumours, hitherto unheeded or unknown, perhaps indeed purposely forged at the time, were now thoroughly credited.”*

In addition to all these imaginary terrors, and before the monarch was borne to his tomb, a large comet became visible in England. The greatest Danish army that ever landed upon our island never spread such consternation as was produced by this fiery messenger. Such a phenomenon as this was but wanted to crown their superstitious horrors. The people assembled to gaze on it with pale and terror-stricken countenances in the streets of the towns and villages. In their eyes it denoted death, desolation, famine, invasion, slaughter, and “all the ills which flesh is heir to.” A monk of Malmesbury, who professed the study of astronomy, gave utterance to the following ominous declaration:—“Thou hast, then, returned at length; thou that wilt cause so many mothers to weep! many years have I seen thee shine; but thou seemest to me more terrible now, that thou announcest the ruin of my country.”

Edward never held up his head again, nor uttered another cheerful word after the return of Harold. From that time, until he expired, he scarcely ever ceased to reproach himself for having caused the war which hung so threateningly over England, by entrusting foreigners, instead of his own countrymen, with the affairs of his government. Day and night these thoughts beset him, and he endeavoured in vain to drive them away by religious exercises, and by adding donation upon donation to the churches and monasteries. In vain did the priests pray—in vain did he seek respite by listening to the Bible, which was read to him, for those passages of sublime and fearful grandeur which figuratively announce the coming of the Most High, to punish the nations who had rebelled against His commandments, fell upon his ear like an ominous knell. Writhing upon his death-bed, he would exclaim, “The Lord hath bent His bow—He hath prepared His sword, and hath manifested his anger.” Such words struck horror into the souls of all who surrounded his bed, with the exception of Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, who, it is said, smiled with contempt upon those who trembled at the ravings of a sick old man.

* Thierry's Norman Conquest, vol. i. p. 151.

According to the authority of the Saxon Chronicle, Eadmar, Roger of Hoveden, Florence of Worcester, Simeon of Durham, and partially by William of Malmesbury, and Thierry, a careful ransacker of ancient chronicles, it is said, "However weak the mind of the aged Edward, he had the courage, before he expired, to declare to the chiefs who consulted him as to the choice of his successor, that, in his opinion, the man worthy to reign was Harold, the son of Godwin." Edward just lived to see the opening of the most eventful year in our annals—that in which England was invaded by the Normans. He expired on the eve of Epiphany, in the sixty-sixth year of his age, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, where his shrine, though mutilated by time and rude hands, still remains standing in that edifice which his own piety caused him to rebuild, and which illness alone prevented him from being present to witness its consecration. He was long remembered by the Saxons for the body of laws he compiled, which his oppressed countrymen made their rallying cry, whenever they gained an ascendancy over their stern task-masters, the Normans. His conduct to Editha, doubtless, arose from his dislike to earl Godwin, and the persuasions of his Norman favourites, for he seems to have ever been a man of a wavering mind, and who seldom acted from an opinion of his own. With him perished the last king who was legitimately descended from the great Alfred; for although Harold was a Saxon, and displayed as much military and political genius as any (excepting Alfred) in whose veins flowed the blood of kings, he was still the son of the cowherd Godwin, a humble, but more honourable line of descent than that of William the Bastard, against whom he was so soon to measure his strength, for he was at this period busily though silently preparing for the invasion of England.

The Danes were heathens; they professed not Christianity—this Norman did; yet when England was ruled over by a king who had been elected by the voice of the whole witenagemot, an election that had scarcely ever been disputed, this Norman bastard, this son of Robert the Devil, came over with his hired cut-throats, and armed robbers, and having drenched a once happy country with blood, he covered its smiling shores and cheerful fields with desolation and blackened ashes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ACCESSION OF HAROLD, THE SON OF GODWIN.

“ You have conspired against our royal person,
 Joined with an enemy proclaimed, and from his coffers
 Received the golden earnest of our death ;
 Wherein you would have sold your king to slaughter,
 His princes and his peers to servitude,
 His subjects to oppression and contempt,
 And his whole kingdom unto desolation.”—SHAKSPERE.

HAROLD, the last Saxon who sat upon the throne of England, was elected king by a large assembly of chiefs and nobles in London, on the evening of the very day which saw the body of Edward the Confessor consigned to the tomb. He was crowned by the archbishop Stigand, who, although labouring under the ban of the court of Rome, boldly officiated at this important ceremony. The archbishop is represented in the Bayeux tapestry as standing on the left hand of Harold, who is seated upon the throne, on the day of his coronation. Edgar Atheling, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, was still alive, and was the undoubted heir to the crown, though none of the nobles appear to have advocated his claim. Harold was honourably and legally elected by the witenagemot, which, as we have shown on several occasions, had by its unanimous consent frequently set the rightful heir aside, and placed upon the throne such a successor as was considered most competent to govern. One of our old chroniclers, Holinshed, says, “ He studied by all means which way to win the people’s favour, and omitted no occasion whereby he might show any token of bounteous liberality, gentleness, and courteous behaviour towards them. The grievous customs, also, and taxes which his predecessor had raised, he either abolished or diminished; the ordinary wages of his servants and men of war he increased; and, further, showed himself very well bent to all virtue and goodness.” Sharon Turner wisely and cautiously observes, that “ the true character of Harold cannot be judged from his actions in the emergency of competition; as he perished before the virtues of his disposition could be distinguished from those of his convenience.” Harold commenced his

reign by restoring things to their old Saxon forms; he affixed Saxon signatures to his deeds, instead of the Norman seal. Although he did not go so far as to banish all the Normans from his court, it is not improbable that such as were permitted to remain did so at the intercession of Edward on his death-bed. It was a Norman who bore the tidings of the death of Edward to duke William.

The duke was engaged in his park near Rouen when he received the news of Harold's accession; he was busy trying some new arrows when the messenger arrived. In a moment he became thoughtful, crossed the Seine, and hastened to his palace; when he entered the great hall, he began to pace hurriedly to and fro, occasionally fastening and untying the cord that secured his cloak, then again sitting down for a moment, and the next instant hastily arising. He was evidently staggered by Harold's boldness; not probably that he expected his aid, but at the suddenness with which he had assumed the crown. For some time no one dared speak to the "fiery duke;" all stood apart, either in silence or conversing in subdued whispers. An officer at last entered, who either being admitted to more familiarity, or possessing more courage than the rest, thus accosted the angry Norman: "My lord," said he, "why not communicate your intelligence to us? It is rumoured that the king of England is dead, and that Harold has broken his faith to you, by seizing the kingdom." "They report truly," answered the duke, sternly and briefly; "my anger is touching his death, and the injury Harold has done to me." This courtier must have been well acquainted with William's designs, and we can readily fancy the grim smile that faded over the duke's countenance when the officer had completed his harangue, which was as follows: "Chafe not at a thing that may be amended. There is no remedy for Edward's death; but for the wrong which Harold has done, there is. Yours is the right. You have good knights; strike boldly—well begun is half done."* No one knew this better than the duke himself; he now found that he could not obtain the kingdom by trickery—that all the trouble he had taken to muster the relics together had been labour in vain,—that fighting in a distant country was an expensive business,—so he went in to consult with his councillors—to consider the ways and means, to reckon up the cost of this great expected

* Thierry, vol. ii. p. 154.

gain, and to see which would be the best and cheapest way of executing the few thousands of murders which it was necessary to perpetrate before he could gain possession. The evil genius of the son of Robert the Devil was equal to the emergency.

We must now return to Tostig, who, it will be remembered, when Harold advocated the cause of the oppressed Danes, fled to Flanders, and found shelter at the court of earl Baldwin, whose daughter, Judith, he had married. Earl Baldwin, it will be borne in mind, was the father of Matilda; thus, William the Norman, and Tostig, the son of Godwin, and brother to king Harold, had married two sisters. Tostig seems never to have forgiven his brother for deciding in favour of Morkar, the son of Algar,—who had supplanted him in the government of Northumbria; and no sooner did he hear that Harold was seated upon the throne of England, than he hastily left Flanders, and hurried to Normandy to urge his brother-in-law, duke William, to commence hostilities against England. Although the plans of the Norman duke were not yet matured, William had no objection to set brother against brother; thinking, no doubt, that any attack would serve to divert the attention of Harold from the main invasion, and give him a better opportunity of striking the meditated blow. William supplied Tostig with several vessels, promising him also, as soon as he was prepared, to come to his assistance. With these ships, which were insufficient for the attack, Tostig sailed into the Baltic in search of allies, promising the kingdom to any one who would assist him to conquer it. For this purpose, he sought out the king of Denmark, who was related to him on his mother's side; but the Danish sovereign, well aware that thousands of his subjects were then living peacefully and happily in England, reprimanded him sternly for attempting to invade his brother's dominions, and refused to assist him. Nothing daunted by his ill success, Tostig next steered to the coast of Norway, where Harald Hardrada, the last of the bold Scandinavian sea-kings, reigned.

Few men of that day had seen more service than the Norwegian king, Harald; he had fought endless battles, both by sea and land,—had, in turn, set out to pillage as a pirate, and to conquer and subdue with all the right and might of a sea-king. He had fought in the east, visited Constantinople, enrolled himself in a troop of his own countrymen who, by their valour and daring, had already distinguished themselves both in Asia

and Africa; and, though brother to a king, he had, with his battle-axe on his shoulders, timed his footsteps to a march as he mounted guard, like a humble sentinel, at the sculptured gates of the Asiatic palaces. Having enriched himself by serving as a "soldier of fortune," he became weary of the outward grandeur and internal languor of these effeminate courts, pined for the fresh air which blew about his own bluff headlands, and longed again to feel the cold sea spray beating upon his sun-tanned cheeks, and to guide his sea-horse over the ever-moving billows. So one day he entered the palace with his battle-axe over his shoulder, and said that it was his intention to return to Norway. His resignation was received with reluctance: the Asiatic king would rather have parted with a hundred of his followers than with Harald Hardrada. The Norwegian soon found it was his intention to detain him by force; so, seizing a ship, he carried with him a beautiful princess whose affections he had won, and left the imperial palace to guard itself. Once upon the sea, Harald was in no hurry to reach home. He had still room in his ship for more treasures,—he had his beautiful and willing captive for a companion,—his ship filled with grim warriors, who, at his bidding, were ready to grapple with the most formidable dangers; so, after a long piratical cruise along the coast of Sicily, during which he had laden his vessel with treasures, he returned home, raised an army, and laid claim to the throne of Norway. He soon succeeded in obtaining a share of the dominions. To this valorous vikinger, so renowned for his perilous adventures and daring deeds, Tostig came for assistance, promising him England if he could but win it. Hardrada was easily persuaded; he loved to be where blows rained heavily, where dangers hemmed him in—he seemed to breathe more freely where the current of air was stirred by the struggle of arms,—so promised that, as soon as the ice melted and liberated his fleet, he would set sail for England.*

Impatient to commence the attack, Tostig landed upon the northern coast of England, at the head of such adventurers as he could muster, and began to pillage the towns and villages north of the Humber. He was opposed by Morkar, the

* Thierry's "Norman Conquest."

governor of Northumbria, and compelled to retreat into Scotland, where he awaited the arrival of Harald Hardrada.

While these events were in progress, the duke of Normandy was not inactive, but despatched a messenger to England, who, arriving at the court of Harold, thus addressed the Saxon king:—"William, duke of Normandy, reminds thee of the oath which thou didst swear to him, by mouth and by hand, on good and holy relics." The son of Godwin answered,—“It is true that I swore such an oath to duke William, but I swore it under compulsion; I promised that which did not belong to me, and which I could not perform; for my royalty is not mine, and I cannot divest myself of it without the consent of my country, nor, without the consent of the country, can I marry a foreign wife. As to my sister, whom the duke claims, to marry her to one of his chiefs, she died this year:—would he have me send him her body?”

William, who was not yet ready to commence operations against England, after having received Harold's answer, sent the Saxon king another message, requesting him to fulfil at least a portion of the promise he had made, and if he would not enter into all the conditions he had sworn to, to marry his daughter, according to promise. But Harold was resolved not to fulfil a single promise which had been forced from him under such circumstances, therefore sent back a flat refusal, and a few days after married a Saxon lady, the sister of Morkar, governor of Northumbria.

From the very moment that the news of this marriage reached the Norman court, all concession was at an end. William swore a solemn oath, and vowed, by the splendour of God, that within a year he would appear in person, and demand the whole of the debt, and “pursue the perjurer to the very places where he thought he had the surest and firmest footing.”

Leaving duke William busily preparing for his invasion, we must again glance at England, which Harald Hardrada was already on his way to attack, with a large fleet. A feeling of fear and discontent seems to have reigned amid the Norwegian soldiers. Many of them were disturbed by signs and omens—others believed that they had prophetic revelations during their sleep. “One of them,” says Thierry, “dreamed that he saw his companions land on the coast of England, and in the presence of the English army; that in the front of this army,

riding upon a wolf, was a woman of gigantic stature; the wolf held in his jaws a human body, dripping with gore, and when he had devoured it, the woman gave him another. A second soldier dreamed that the fleet sailed, and that a flock of crows, vultures, and other birds of prey, were perched upon the masts and sails of the vessels. On an adjacent rock a woman was seated, holding a drawn sword in her hand, and looking at and counting the vessels. She said to the birds, 'Go without fear, you shall have enough to eat, and you shall have plenty to choose from, for I go with them.'" After the relation of such dreams as these had cast a gloom over the whole fleet, every petty disaster which would have passed unnoticed at another time, was construed into an evil omen. Thus, when Harald Hardrada, who was a tall, heavy man, placed his foot on board the royal vessel, they fancied that the weight of his body either tilted it aside, or pressed it down more than usual; and such a trifling incident as this could not be viewed without disheartening the soldiers.

But the bold sea-king was not to be affrighted by such airy shadows as these. He sailed along the eastern coast of Scotland, until he came to where Tostig's vessels were anchored; when uniting their forces, they made their way to Scarborough, and attacked the town. Here Hardrada was again in his element. The Saxon and Danish inhabitants made a bold defence. In vain did the sea-king thunder at the gates with his battle-axe—he could not gain admission. A portion of the town of Scarborough at this time lay stretched out at the foot of a high and commanding rock. The bold Norwegian had stormed too many towns to be daunted by trifles; so summoning his followers to cut down all the trees which grew at hand, he raised an enormous pile of trunks and branches upon the summit of the rock, and firing it, with the stubble and dried grass which he had placed below, he raised such a conflagration as the inhabitants had never before witnessed. While the high pile was crackling, and blazing, and lighting up the country for miles around, he ordered his soldiers to roll down the burning mass upon the houses at the foot of the rock. The gates were speedily opened; and as the inhabitants rushed out, the sea-king and his followers entered to pillage the town.

Leaving Scarborough behind, they quitted the German ocean and entered the Humber, and sailed round the wolds of York-

shire into the Ouse, for Tostig was eager to reach York, and instal himself once more in the seat of his former government. Morkar, who had succeeded him, and whose sister king Harold had married, mustered his forces together, and gave battle to the invaders; he was, however, compelled to retreat, and escaping into York, which was strongly fortified, he shut himself up, and left the besiegers encamped around the walls.

Meantime king Harold was in the south, waiting the arrival of duke William, for with a powerful army he had kept a watch upon the coast nearest Norway night and day. But the summer was now over, and autumn having set in, Harold, it is said, misled by a message which he is reported to have received from Baldwin, earl of Flanders, was led to believe that the duke of Normandy would not commence his threatened invasion until the following spring. But whether this report was true or not, the son of Godwin well knew that his kingdom would be exposed to greater danger if he allowed two armies to march upon him at once; that with the Norwegians advancing from the north, and the Normans from the south, he should be hemmed in between two enemies; so turning his face towards York, he resolved to attack those who had already landed, to clear the ground, and make more space for the new comers. Having once decided, Harold lost not a moment, but riding himself at the head of his chosen troops, he by rapid marches reached York, on the evening of the fourth day after his departure. The next day was appointed for the surrender of the city; for many of the inhabitants, fearful that the enemy would assail their city as they had before done Scarborough, had resolved to throw open the gates on the following morning, and accept again their ancient governor Tostig. Harold, apprised of this, ordered such of the citizens as were faithful to resume their arms, keep a close guard over the gates, and on no account to allow any one to pass over to the Norwegian camp during the night. Encouraged by the tidings of the arrival of the Saxon army, the citizens remained true to their trust; nor were Hardrada nor Tostig aware, until the next day, that Harold was encamped in the neighbourhood.

The morning ushered in one of those bright and beautiful days, which look as if summer had come back again to peep at the earth before her final departure; for although it was now near the close of September, and the harvest-fields were silent

the sunlight broke as brilliantly upon the grey old walls of the city of York as ever it had done while the green old waysides of England were garlanded with the wild roses of June. The day being hot and bright, the Norwegians, unconscious that they were so near an enemy, had left their coats of mail on board of the ships, which were at some distance from the city. As they were marching up to enter the gates, as they supposed, peaceably, and in accordance with the terms which were agreed upon the previous day, the king of Norway beheld a cloud of dust rising in the distance, amid which his experienced eye instantly detected the glittering of arms in the sunshine. "Who are these men advancing towards us?" said Hardrada to Tostig. "It can only be Englishmen coming to demand pardon and implore our friendship," answered Tostig; but scarcely had he uttered the words, before a large and well ordered body of men in armour stood out clear and distinct in the distance, headed by Harold, the last king of the Saxons. "The enemy—the enemy!" resounded from line to line; and three horsemen were instantly despatched with all speed to bring up the remainder of the army, who were behind in the camp; and the king of Norway, unfurling his banner, which he called the "Ravager of the world!" drew up his army around it in the form of a half moon, the outer verge of which extended towards Harold, while the rounded wings, which bent back, were filled up with the same strength and depth as the centre. The first line stood with the ends of their lances planted in the ground and held in an upward and slanting direction, with the points turned towards the Saxons. The second line held their spears above the shoulders of the first, ready to plunge them into the riders when their horses had rushed upon the points of the foremost spears. They stood shoulder to shoulder, and shield to shield, while the king of Norway, on his black charger, rode along the ranks, encouraging his men to stand firm, and, although without their cuirasses, to fear not the edges of blue steel. "The sun glitters upon our helmets," said he; "that is enough for brave men." While Hardrada was riding round, and encouraging his men, his heavy black war horse stumbled, and he fell to the ground; but he sprang up again in an instant, and leaped into his saddle. Harold, who stood near enough to see his fall, inquired who that large and majestic person was. When answered that it was the king of Norway, Harold replied, "His fortune will be disastrous."

The sea-king wore on that day a blue tunic, while his head was surmounted by a splendid helmet, both of which had attracted the attention of the Saxon king.

Before the battle commenced, Harold ordered a score of his warriors, who were well mounted, and armed from head to heel, to advance towards the front of the Norwegian lines, and summon his brother Tostig to appear. The Saxon rode out of the Norwegian ranks, when one of the horsemen exclaimed, "Thy brother greets thee by me, and offers thee peace, his friendship, and thy ancient honours." Tostig replied, "These words are very different from the insults and hostilities they made me submit to a year ago; but if I accept them, what shall be given to my faithful ally, Harald Hardrada, king of Norway?" "He," answered the Saxon messenger, "shall have seven feet of ground, or, as he is a very tall man, perhaps a little more." Tostig bade the messengers depart, and tell his brother Harold to prepare for fight; for, true to his word, the Saxon was resolved to stand or fall with the brave Norwegian sea-king.*

Near the commencement of the battle, the Norwegian king was slain by a random arrow, which pierced his throat. The first charge of the Saxon cavalry was received firmly on the points of the implanted spears, and it was not until the English horsemen began to retreat in some confusion, when the Norwegians were tempted to break through their hitherto impenetrable ranks, that the Saxons obtained any advantage. While the combat still raged fiercely under the command of Tostig, Harold once more singled out his brother in the battle-field, dispatched to him a messenger, and again offered him both peace and life, with permission to the Norwegians to return to their own country unmolested; but Tostig had resolved to win either death or victory. He was determined to accept no favour from his brother's hands, and the arrival of fresh troops from the ships, who were completely armed, seemed to revive fresh hopes in his bosom. But these new troops were not in a fit state to enter the field. Heated with the rapidity with which they had marched, under a weight of heavy armour, that the sun seemed to burn through, they offered but a feeble resistance to the charge of the Saxon cavalry; and when a rumour ran through the field that their standard was captured,

* Turner's Anglo-Saxons, vol. ii. p. 396.

Tostig and most of the Norwegian leaders slain, they gladly accepted the peace which king Harold for the third time offered them. Olaf, the son of the king of Norway, having sworn friendship to Harold, returned to his own country with the sad remnant of his father's fleet. "The same wind," says Thierry, "which swelled the Saxon banners, as they fluttered over a victorious field, filled the Norman sails, and wafted a more formidable enemy towards the coast of Sussex." The ominous curtain was drawn up for the last time, which in a few days was doomed to fall down, and shut out for ever the last of the Saxons that ever wore the crown of England.

The Norman Invasion

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ENGLAND INVADED BY THE NORMANS.

“Down royal state! all you sage counsellors, hence!
 And to the English court assemble now,
 From every region, apes of idleness!
 Now, neighbour confines, purge you of your scum:
 Have you a ruffian, that will swear, drink, dance,
 Revel the night; rob, murder, and commit
 The oldest sins the newest kind of ways?
 Be happy, he will trouble you no more:
 England shall double gild his treble guilt;
 England shall give him office, honour, might.”—SHAKSPERE.

WE must now carry our readers to Normandy, to the life and stir, and busy preparation which nearly eight hundred years ago took place in that country. We must waft their imagination across the ocean to those masses of living and moving men who then existed, and endeavour to look at them, as if they still lived, and were actuated then as now. At the busy workmen who were employed in building ships, labouring all the more eagerly in hopes that amid the scramble of the war they might become the commanders of the vessels they were helping to construct—at the smiths and armourers, who were then forging lances and swords, and coats of mail, trusting that when their work was done, and the victory won, they should in England become great lords, and have a score or two of followers to carry before them the very lances which their own hard hands had hammered out. At the tailor, who sat hemming gonfannons, and the embroiderer who worked the figures of lions' and bulls' heads, dragons, and all imaginable monsters, upon pennon or banner, fondly dreaming they should one day sit in the lordly halls of England with the banner, the cunning workmanship of their hands fluttering above their heads, while they, no longer “knights of the shears and thimble,” should throw aside the goose and needle, and become

great rulers in conquered England. At the cooper, who thundered away cheerfully as he drove his hoops down the casks, believing that when his work was finished, he should on the other side of the ocean become a count; the shoemaker, who hammered and stitched for every shoeless vagabond who came toiling up the dusty roads from Maine and Anjou, under promise that he should have the fairest Saxon wife he could capture. The tinker, who had clouted pots and pans, but now turned his hand to the riveting of helmets, under the hope of becoming a rich thane when he landed in Britain. For hedgers and ditchers, weavers, and drovers—all the scum and outcast of Poitou, and Brittany, France, and Flanders, now came in rags and tatters—the “shoeless-stocracy” from Aquitaine and Burgundy, hurried up under the hope of one day becoming the aristocracy of England—some offered to murder and burn for their food and lodging only—others brought their bread and cheese and garlic, ready bundled up, and were willing to slay and desolate, and do any damnable deed for their passage alone, so that they might be allowed to pick up a stray Saxon princess or two, or take possession of any old comfortable castle, when the burning and murdering were over. Such a collection of thieves and vagabonds, and un-hung rascals, were never covered in under the hatches of all the ships that have carried out convicts since the day that England first discharged its cargoes of vice and wretchedness upon the shores of Australia. All these ragged and unprincipled rascals—no matter from what quarter they came—were instantly set at work; some, who were fit for nothing else, rubbed and scrubbed and polished corslets and helmets, shields and spurs; others sharpened spears and pikes and javelins, grinding and rubbing the points upon any stone they could find; many were beasts of burthen, and toiled from morning till night, in carrying stores to the ships; and all these ragamuffins were destined to sail under a banner, which the pope himself had consecrated, and under a bull to which a ring was appended, containing one of the hairs of St. Peter set in a diamond of great value. All these dogs in doublets, hounds in armour, murderers in mail, cut-throats in corslets, and robbers at heart, were, about eight hundred years ago, congregated on that great mustering-ground of villany, Normandy; and there they matured their plans for breaking into the peaceful homes, and slaying the unoffending inhabitants of England.

The Evil One, doubtless, cast his triumphant eye over that vast assembly, then hurried off to enlarge his fiery dominion against their coming.

Before setting out on his invasion, the crafty Norman had, by laying an accusation of sacrilege against Harold, at the court of Rome, obtained permission to bring back England to the obedience of the holy church, and to enforce the payment of the tax of Peter's-pence. Added to this, he got a bull of excommunication against the Saxon king and his adherents; and armed with such credentials, he set out to murder, burn, and desolate, under the sanction of the holy church. Thus, William was armed with a power more dreaded, in that superstitious age, by the blinded and ignorant multitude, than the edge of the sword. Nor is it probable, considering the breach which existed between England and Rome, that the pontiff for a moment took into consideration the circumstances under which William extorted the oath from Harold. Besides obtaining the vindictive sanction of that church which professed only peace and good-will towards all mankind—whose harshest emblem was a pastoral crook, with which to draw back tenderly the sheep that had wandered from the fold—but who, instead of this, consecrated (solemn mockery!) the banner which was so soon to wave over a field steeped with the blood of Christians. Besides obtaining this unholy power, the Norman duke made use of all the duplicity he was master of, to persuade and compel his subjects to furnish the funds which were so necessary to fit out his expedition. He summoned his brothers, by the mother's side, Eudes and Robert, sons of the old tanner of Falaise, who had now turned down the sleeves of their doublets, cast aside their leathern aprons, and having got rid of the aroma of the tan-pit, one had become bishop of Bayeux, and the other count of Mortain. These, together with his barons, summoned to the conference, pledged themselves, not only to serve him with their body and their goods, but even to the selling or mortgaging of their estates, although they were pretty sure, in case of success, of having whatever they might advance returned to them an hundred-fold. They were of opinion, that those who were not so likely to become partakers of the spoil, should be compelled to contribute to the cost. On this hint, which was probably his own, duke William convoked a large assembly of men from all professions and stations of life in Normandy, amongst whom were many of the richest merchants in

his dominions. When they met, he explained his wants, and solicited their assistance. They listened, then withdrew, in order to consult each other as to what measures should be taken.

Seldom had there been such a hubbub in Normandy as this assembly presented. Some, whom there is but little doubt had previously made their arrangements with either the duke or his officials, were ready to give ships, money, or anything they possessed; others, who had come to no understanding as to what return was to be made, would give nothing, but said that they were already burthened with more debts than they could pay. In the midst of this confusion, when fifty were talking like one, and they could scarcely hear each other speak for their own clamour, William Fitz-Osbern, the seneschal, or ducal lieutenant of Normandy, entered the hall, and raising his voice high above the rest, he exclaimed, "Why dispute ye thus? He is your lord—he has need of you; it were better your duty to make your offers, and not to await his request. If you fail him now, and he gain his end, he will remember it; prove, then, that you love him, and act accordingly." "Doubtless," cried the opponents, "he is our lord; but is it not enough for us to pay him his dues? We owe him no aid beyond the seas; he has already enough oppressed us with his wars; let him fail in his new enterprise, and our country is undone."*

It was at last resolved that Fitz-Osbern should lead the way, and make the best terms he could with the duke. He did; and they followed him probably not further than the next apartment, where William was awaiting their decision; and great must have been their astonishment when the seneschal commenced his oration. In vain did they shrug up their shoulders, lift up their eyes, and exclaim, "No, no! we did not say this; we will not do that." Onward plunged Fitz-Osbern deeper and deeper, declaring that they were the most loyal and zealous people in the world—that they were ready to serve him here, there, and everywhere,—that they would give him all they possessed; and, more than that, that those who had supplied him with two mounted soldiers would now furnish four. In vain they roared out, "No, no! we will serve him in his own country, but nowhere beside." Fitz-Osbern had in his imagination jerked them across the ocean, and furnished William with an army in no time;

* Thierry's Norman Conquest, vol. i. p. 160.

and when he had finished, he left them to settle as they best could with the duke,—for there is no doubt the matter had been previously concocted between the seneschal and William.

The duke of Normandy either was, or pretended to be surprised and enraged beyond measure. Could his seneschal have deceived him, or could they be so disloyal as to refuse to furnish him with the aid he required? Such a matter must be looked into—and it was. He sent separately for the most influential of the leaders; had a private conference with each; and, when they came out, they were ready to grant him everything. He gave them sealed letters for security; and what they contained we may readily guess—for the man who consented to portion out England to his followers before they had conquered it, was not likely to stick at giving away all Europe [on parchment] to secure his ends. By such tricks as these, sorry are we to write it, he obtained the aid of many brave and honourable men. But for this, we might have ranked his invasion with an army of unprincipled adventurers, amongst the ravages of those Goths and Vandals who in the darker ages overran Greece and Rome. “He published his proclamation,” says Thierry, “in the neighbouring countries, and offered good pay and the pillage of England to every man who would serve him with lance, sword, or cross-bow; and multitudes accepted the invitation, coming by every road, far and near, from north and south. All the professional adventurers, all the military vagabonds of western Europe, hastened to Normandy by long marches; some were knights and chiefs of war, the others simple foot-soldiers and serjeants-of-arms, as they were then called. Some demanded money-pay, others only their passage, and all the booty they might make. Some asked for land in England, a domain, a castle, a town; others simply required some rich Saxon in marriage. Every thought, every desire of human avarice presented itself; “William rejected no one,” says the Norman chronicle, “and satisfied every one as well as he could.”

From spring to autumn, Normandy was the great rallying point for every one who had strength enough to wield arms, and were willing to dash out the brain of his fellow-men. The three-lion banner threw its folds over more crime and cruelty than was, perhaps, ever found amongst the same number of men; and the doors of this huge inhuman sty were about to be opened, and the grim, savage, and tusked herd turned loose, to slay, root-up,

overrun, and desecrate a country to which Alfred the Great had given laws—a kingdom that already stood second to none in the wide world for civilization. These man-slayers ran together to hunt in couples—they became sworn brothers in arms—they vowed to share all they gained—they made these promises in churches—they knelt hand in hand before the holy altars, and blasphemously called God to witness that they would equally divide what they obtained by bloodshed and robbery. Prayers were said, and psalms chaunted, and tapers burnt in churches for the success of these armed marauders; yet neither the thunder nor the lightning nor an avenging arm descended to strike dead the impious priests who thus dared to invoke His sacred name in so unholy a cause; and for ages after, many a golden cross and sacred vessel of gold or silver, which had once decorated the altars of the English monasteries, were seen in the mis-called sacred buildings of Normandy—rewards which were given by the Norman Bastard to these mitred blasphemers. Some were honourable enough to refuse to co-operate with the Norman on any terms, like the high-minded Gilbert Fitz-Richard, who came over with the duke because he was his liege lord; and when the period of his servitude had expired, returned again to his own country, no richer than when he came. But there were few, we fear, like him. Thierry says, “He was the only one among the knights who accompanied the Norman that claimed neither lands nor gold.” Many, we know, while the army was encamped near the river Dive, did homage for the lauds which were then in the peaceable possession of the Saxons, who little dreamed, while they were superintending the gathering in of their harvest, that the Norman Bastard was already portioning out their fair domains amongst men who had sworn to do his “bloody business.”

When William applied to Philip of France for his assistance—and in the most humiliating terms offered to do homage for England, and to hold it as the vassal of France—Philip refused to assist him. With the count of Flanders, his brother-in-law, he fared no better; and when Conan, king of Brittany, heard that duke William, whom he looked upon as an usurper, and the murderer of his father, was preparing for the invasion of England, he sent him the following message by one of his chamberlains:—“I hear that thou art about to cross the sea, to conquer the kingdom of England. Now, duke Robert, whose son

thou pretendest to be, on departing for Jerusalem, remitted all his heritage to count Allan, my father, who was his cousin; but thou and thy accomplices poisoned my father. Thou hast appropriated to thyself his seigneurie, and hast detained it to this day, contrary to all justice, seeing that thou art a bastard. Restore me, then, the duchy of Normandy, which belongs to me, or I will make war upon thee to the last extremity with all the forces at my disposal."

The Norman historians state that William was somewhat alarmed at this message, as such an attack must have prevented his meditated invasion; but the king of Brittany did not survive his threat many days. The Norman succeeded in bribing the chamberlain to murder his royal master, and this he accomplished by rubbing the mouth-piece of his hunting horn with deadly poison, so that when Conan next rode to the chase, he blew his last blast. Many of William's enemies were at this time, beyond doubt, removed by similar means. Nor do such deeds startle the historian as he draws nearer to that land of horrors; to the threshold of that country which, by his command, was stained with the blood of a hundred thousand murders. The successor of Conan, warned by the fate of father and son, patched up a peace with the Norman, and allowed many of his subjects to accompany the expedition.

When all was in readiness for this long threatened invasion, a contrary wind set in, and kept the large fleet, which amounted to many hundred sail, for nearly a whole month at the mouth of the Dive, a river which falls into the sea between the Seine and the Orne. After this a southerly breeze sprang up, and wafted the mighty armament as far as the roadsteads of St. Valery, near Dieppe; then the wind suddenly changed, and there they were compelled to lie at anchor for several days. Many of the vessels were wrecked; and lest an alarm should spread amongst his troops, William caused the bodies of the drowned men to be buried with speed, and in privacy. Nor did such disasters fail in producing their effects upon his superstitious followers. Some deserted his standard, for they thought that an expedition, which the very elements seemed to oppose, could only be attended with evil. Murmurs broke out in the fleet—the soldiers began to converse with each other, and to exaggerate the number of dead bodies which had been buried in the sand—

to conjure up perils and difficulties which they had never before seen. "The man is mad," said they, "who seeks to seize the land of another. God is offended with such designs, and proves it by refusing us a favourable wind." In vain did William increase the rations of provisions, and supply them with larger portions of strong liquor—the same low feeling of despondency reigned along the shore and in the ships. The soldiers were weary of watching the monotonous waves that ever rolled from the same quarter—they were tired of feeling the wind blow upon their faces from the same direction—but there was no help—no change; the breeze shifted not; and they paced wearily! wearily! along the shore; reckoning up again the number of dead bodies which had already been buried in the sand, then shaking their heads, and muttering to each other, "So many have perished, and yet we are no nearer the battle than when we set out." Others deserted on the morrow.

In vain did duke William attend the church of St. Valery daily, and pray before the shrine of the saint—the little weathercock on the bell-tower still pointed in the same direction day after day—his prayers were of no avail; and sometimes he came out of the church with such an expression on his countenance, as led the beholder to conclude that, from the bottom of his heart, he wished the wind, the weathercock, and the saint, with that dusky gentleman after whom the Normans had nicknamed his father. Weary and disheartened, like his followers, at this long delay, William at last hit upon a device, that at least served to arouse the spirits of his soldiers from the state of despondency into which they had sunk, and to chase from their minds the gloomy doubts and forebodings with which they had been so long overcast. To accomplish this, he took from the church of St. Valery the coffer that contained the relics of the patron saint, and this he had carried with great ceremony through the camp in the centre—it was at last set down; and prayers having been offered up for a favourable wind, the soldiers in procession passed by the relics of the reputed saint, each throwing upon it what he could best afford, until the "shrine was half buried in the heaps of gold, silver, and precious things, which were showered upon it. Thus artfully did he, instead of interposing the authority of a sovereign and a military leader, to punish the language of sedition and mutiny among his troops, oppose

superstition to superstition, to amuse the short-sighted instruments of his ambition.”*

On the following night the wind chanced to change, to the great delight of the priests who attended the camp, and who, while they packed up the rich offerings which had been thrown over the dry and marrowless bones of a good and pious old man, failed not to attribute the natural change in the current of the atmosphere to the intercession of St. Valery. At daybreak, on the twenty-seventh of September, the sky was bright and beautiful—the wind blowing in a favourable direction from the south, and the sun, which had for many days been enveloped in mists and clouds, now rose with a summer-like splendour, throwing long trails of golden light over the green and ridgy sea. The camp was immediately broken up, the sails were hoisted, and in a few hours the large fleet, which contained upwards of sixty thousand men, launched forth into the open sea amid the deep braying of the Norman trumpets. Foremost in the van rode the beautiful vessel which contained William, duke of Normandy. At its mast-head fluttered the consecrated banner which had been sent by the pope, and below this streamed out another flag, marked with the cross of Calvary, for so was the emblem of our salvation profaned. The sails were of various colours, and on them were emblazoned in gold the three lions, the haughty arms of Normandy. The prow of the vessel was decorated with the figure of a child, bearing a bent bow in its hand, as if in the act of discharging an arrow. When night closed in over the sea, a large lantern was hoisted to the mast-head of this magnificent vessel, and through the hours of darkness that vast fleet marched from wave to wave, every billow rolling it nearer to the shores of England. When the grey morning again dawned upon the sea, the Norman chief, finding that he had far outsailed his fleet, sent one of his sailors up the mast to see if he could descry the lagging ships in the distance. At first, the man who was despatched to look out saw nothing but sea and sky; but on his third ascent, he exclaimed, “I see a forest of masts and sails!” William then either dropped his anchor, or took in his canvas, until the foremost vessels approached, and in a few hours after, the vast armament was riding safely in Pevensey Bay; only one or two vessels having

* “Lives of the Queens of England,” by Agnes Strickland, vol. i. p. 31, 37.

been lost, while crossing the English channel, and in one of these was a famous astrologer who had predicted that the voyage would terminate without a disaster; but when William heard of his death, he shrewdly remarked, "that he who could not foresee his own fate, was ill adapted to foretel the fate of others."

It appears that the Saxon vessels which had so long been cruising upon the coast of Sussex, awaiting the arrival of the Normans, had returned to port from want of provisions. Thus William was enabled to land his troops without opposition; and on the 28th of September, his forces disembarked at Pevensey, on the coast of Sussex. The archers, who wore short coats, and had their hair cut close, were the first to land. They were followed by the knights, who wore corslets of burnished mail, and conical shaped helmets of glittering steel; each bore in his hand a strong lance, while at his side hung a long, straight, double-edged sword. Then came the pioneers, the carpenters, and the smiths, each wheeling up and forming themselves into separate divisions, until the whole shore was covered with armed men and horses, above whose heads fluttered the gonfannons and the larger banners, which were so soon to serve as beacons in the rallying points of battle. William was the last to land, and his foot had scarcely touched the sandy shore before he stumbled and fell. A murmur arose amid the assembled host, and voices were heard to exclaim, "This is an evil sign." But the duke, with that ready talent which enabled him to give a favourable appearance to serious as well as trifling disasters, suddenly sprang up, and showing the sand which he had grasped in his fall, exclaimed, "Lords, what is it you say? What, are you amazed? I have taken seizin of this land with my hands, and, by the splendour of God, all that it contains is ours." One of the soldiers then ran hastily forward, and tearing a handful of thatch from the roof of a neighbouring cottage, an ancient mode of conveyance, which still exists, he presented it to the duke, saying, "Sire, I give you *seizin*, in token that the realm is yours." William answered, "I accept it, and may God be with us." Refreshments were then distributed to the soldiers as they rested upon the beach.

The army moved a little onward in the direction of Hastings, a spot favourable to encamp upon having been selected, two strong wooden fortresses, which had been prepared in Normandy, were erected; and thus strongly fortified, William

awaited the coming of the Saxons. On the following day, the work of pillage commenced. Troops of Normans over-ran the country—the whole coast was in a state of alarm; the inhabitants fled from their houses, concealing their cattle and goods, and congregating in the churches and churchyards, as if they trusted that the dust of the dead would be a protection to them against their foreign invaders. The peasants assembled on the distant hills, and looked with terror upon the strong fortresses, and the immense body of men which they could see moving about the coast. A Saxon knight mounted his horse, and hurried off, without slackening his rein, to carry the tidings to Harold. Day and night did he ride, scarcely allowing himself time for either food or refreshment, until, reaching the ancient hall at York, where Harold was seated at his dinner, he rushed into the presence of the Saxon king, and delivering his message in four brief ominous words, exclaimed, “The Normans are come!”*

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

“’Tis better to die at the head of the herd,
 Than to perish alone, unmourned, uninterred;
 To be bound with the brave amid summer’s last sheaves,
 Than be left, the last ear that the reaper’s hand leaves;
 ’Tis better to fall grasping arrow and bow,
 Amid those whom we love, than be slave to a foe;
 For life is the target at which Death’s shafts fly,
 If they miss us we live—if they hit us we die.”

ROYSTON GOWER.

ELATED by the victory which a hasty march and a sudden surprise had enabled him to obtain more easily over the Norwegians, the brave Harold again, without a day’s delay, proceeded to advance rapidly in the direction of the Norman encampment, wearied and thinned as his forces were by the late encounter; hoping by the same unexpected manœuvre and headlong attack, to overthrow at once this new enemy. So

* “Lives of the Queens of England,” by Agnes Strickland vol. i. p. 31, 37.

sanguine was the Saxon king of obtaining the victory, that he commanded a fleet of seven hundred vessels to hasten towards the English Channel, and intercept the enemy's ships if they should, on his approach, attempt to return to Normandy. The force thus despatched, to remain idle and useless upon the ocean, greatly diminished the strength of the army which Harold was about to lead into the field. Added to this, many had abandoned his standard in disgust, because he prohibited them from plundering the Northmen, whom they had so recently conquered—an act of forbearance which, when placed beside his generous dismissal of the vanquished, shows that Harold, like Alfred, blended mercy instead of revenge with conquest. Too confident in the justice of his cause—brave, eager, impetuous, and burning with the remembrance of the wrongs which he had endured, while he lay helpless at the foot of the Norman duke in his own country, the Saxon king hastened with forced marches to London; where he only waited a few days to collect such forces as were scattered about the neighbourhood, instead of gathering around him the whole strength of Mercia, and the thousands which he might have marshalled together from the northern and western provinces. Those who flocked to his standard came singly, or in small bands; they consisted of men who had armed hastily, of citizens who lived in the metropolis, of countrymen who were within a day or two's march of the capital, and even of monks who abandoned their monasteries to defend their country against the invaders. Morkar, the great northern chieftain, who had married Harold's sister, mustered his forces at the first summons, but long before he reached London, Harold was on his way to Hastings. The western militia, and such straggling bands as we have already described, were all that made up for the losses he had sustained at York—for the many who had deserted him because he forbade them to plunder the Norwegians—and the numbers whom he had so unwisely sent away to strengthen the fleet—so that the Saxon king, by his precipitate and ill-timed march, reached the battle-field with a tired and jaded force, which scarcely numbered twenty thousand; and with these he was compelled to combat a practised and subtle leader, who had sixty thousand men at his command, and who, excepting their plunder and forages in the surrounding neighbourhood, had already rested fifteen days in their encampment. The haste that Harold

made was increased by the rumours he heard of the ravages committed by the Normans. It was to put a check to the sufferings which his countrymen were enduring in the vicinity of the Norman encampment, that caused the Saxon king to ride at the head of his brave little army, and to leave London in the twilight of an October evening; and, though so ill prepared, to endeavour to check the insolence of the rapacious invaders. Harold possessed not the cool cunning and calculating foresight of his crafty adversary, but trusted to the goodness of his cause; no marvel then that he evinced the impatience which is so characteristic of a wronged and brave Englishman. It is on record, that the Norman duke forbade his soldiers to plunder the people, but his future conduct is marked by no such forbearance, and we have proof that the inhabitants in the neighbourhood of the encampment abandoned their houses and fled; nor is it probable, for a moment, that such a rabble as he had brought over would rest, for fifteen days, without molesting the English, whose country had already been divided, in promise, amongst them.

Harold found the Norman outposts stationed at some distance from Hastings, and therefore drew up his forces on the range of hills which stand near the site of Battle-abbey. It is said the altar of the abbey was afterwards built on the very spot where the Saxon king planted his standard. Duke William drew up his army more inland, and occupied the opposite eminence. The features of the country have undergone so many changes, that it would almost be impossible to point out the identical hills on which the opposing armies took up their stations, although it seems pretty clear that the place which still bears the name of Battle was that on which the struggle took place. The hills on which the Saxon forces stood arrayed were flanked by a wood. A great portion of this they felled, to strengthen their position by palisades and breast-works, and redoubts, formed by stakes, hurdles, and earth-works, which they hastily threw up, although the soldiery were wearied with their rapid march from London. Messengers had already passed between Harold and William. The latter had offered the Saxon king all the lands beyond the Humber, if he would abandon the throne; or, if he preferred it, to leave the matter to the pope, or to decide the quarrel by single combat. Harold answered, that the God of battles should decide between them. It is said that the Saxon king offered the Norman a large sum

to quit the kingdom: but it is difficult to reconcile such a statement with that of his having despatched seven hundred vessels to prevent the invaders from escaping. A whole day is said to have been wasted in useless messages; and, at length, the Norman went so far as to offer Gurth, Harold's brother, the whole of the lands which had been held by earl Godwin. These, with such as extended beyond the Humber, and which he was willing that the Saxon king should retain, would have left the wily Norman in possession of a much greater portion of England than he was able to obtain until long after that sanguinary struggle had been decided. Harold was firm to his country. He rejected all offers of concession, and was resolved either to rid England of so dangerous an enemy, or perish in the field, and by his example to show those into whose hands the freedom of England might be entrusted, that if he could not conquer he would die as became a brave Saxon, in the defence of his country. Harold seems to have been well aware that the battle would be boldly contested; for when the spies he had sent out to reconnoitre returned with the tidings, that there were more priests in the Norman encampment than soldiers—they having mistaken for monks all such as shaved the beards, and wore the hair short—he smiled, and said, "They whom you saw in such numbers are not priests, but warriors, who will soon show us their worth:" a clear proof that he well knew the valour of the Norman chivalry.

When duke William found that Harold was resolved to fight, he, as a last resource, sent over a monk to renew his offer, and to proclaim that all who aided him were excommunicated by the pope, and that he already possessed the papal bull which pronounced them accursed. Many of the English chiefs began to look with alarm on each other when they heard themselves threatened with excommunication. But one of them, according to the Norman chronicle, boldly answered, "We ought to fight, however great the danger may be; for the question is not about receiving a new lord, if our king were dead—the matter is far different. This duke has given our lands to his barons, knights, and people, many of whom have already done homage for them. They will demand the fulfilment of his promises: and were he to become our king, he would be compelled to give to them our lands, our goods, our wives and our daughters; for he has beforehand promised them all. They have come to wrong both us

and our descendants—to take from us the country of our ancestors;—and what shall we do, or where shall we go, when we have no longer any country?” After such an answer as this, the Norman must have been satisfied that all further attempts at concession were useless—that his real motives were unveiled, that they knew he had abandoned England to the mercy of the armed marauders, who were already drawn up to “kill and take possession,”—and that the army opposed to him consisted of men who were resolved to conquer or die. Nor was he mistaken; for, by the time that the messengers had regained the Norman encampment, the Saxons had vowed before God, that they would neither make peace, nor enter into treaty with such an enemy, but either drive the Normans out of England, or leave their dead bodies in the battle-field.

We wonder not that men who had formed such a resolution should spend the night in chaunting their ancient national songs, and in pledging each other's health, as they passed the cup from hand to hand for the last time—that the bravest of this sworn brotherhood in arms should boast how they would hew their way into the enemy's ranks on the morrow—that many had made up their minds that they should fall—that they had recounted the number of battles they had fought in, the omens they had witnessed, and which foretold their deaths, (for such superstitions were firmly believed by our Saxon ancestors)—that with such feelings as these the ale cup circulated until that clear, cold October midnight had rolled into the heavens all its host of stars. Their talk would be of victory or death—of the hard blows that would be dealt before the moon again climbed so high up the blue steep of midnight—of the friends who were far behind—or the many who, in the face of such an enemy, would be certain to fall;—and, ever and anon, a few stragglers would come dropping in, and welcome recognitions be given. The Normans, who had no new arrivals to pledge, betook themselves to confessing their sins, and preparing for the death they so richly merited. They who were about to bleed for the defence of their country, had already offered up their hearts on freedom's holy altar—the blow only had to be struck, and the blood to flow, and the sacrifice was ended. They had sworn in solemn league, that liberty was to them dearer than life, and such a vow had divested death of all its terrors. In the defence of their homes, their wives, and their

children, they had come forth resolved to leave them free or perish. The valley beneath yawned like a newly made grave, and many a brave Saxon, as he looked into it, knew that there "the wicked would cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest." They who had made up their minds to die in such a cause needed no confession to men—they had registered their vows in heaven; and if the Recording Angel might be pictured as looking down upon the Saxon encampment, it would be with a face pale with pity, and a tear-dimmed eye. What true English heart would not sooner have pledged the healths of the brave Saxons on that eventful night, as they were assembled around their watch-fires, than have bowed amongst the guilty Normans?—have shared death in the glorious halo which the former threw above the grave, rather than have groped their way thither amid the groans and sighs of that great band of meditative murderers, who must have trembled as the hour of danger and death drew nearer.

Gurth had endeavoured in vain to dissuade his brother Harold from taking part in the combat. The Saxon king was deaf to all intreaties; he was too brave to abandon a field, and give up a kingdom with which he had been entrusted, because an oath had been extorted from him on the relics. Such an act would have consigned his name to endless infamy. The morning sun found Harold beside his standard, in the centre of his brave Saxons, which the enemy outnumbered by nearly four to one, besides possessing a formidable army of cavalry; the Saxons appear to have been wholly without such a force, for no mention is made of their horsemen.

It was on Saturday morning, the 14th of October, nearly eight hundred years ago, when the grey dawn, which many a sleepless eye had so anxiously watched, broke dimly over the rival armies, as they stood ranged along the opposite heights; and as the faint autumnal mist passed away, the sun rose slowly upon the scene, and gilded the arms of the combatants, falling upon the large white horse on which the bishop of Bayeaux was mounted, as, with a hauberk over his rochet, he rode along the Norman ranks, and arranged the cavalry. The Norman duke, not less conspicuous, was seen mounted on a Spanish charger, accompanied by Toustain the Fair, who bore in his hand the banner which the Roman pontiff had consecrated; the duke wore around his neck a portion of the relics

on which Harold had sworn; for he well knew that the remains of dead men strangle not. His face was flushed; in his haste he had at first put on his hauberk the wrong way; some had remarked that it was an evil omen, and, as yet, he had scarcely regained his composure, though there was a restlessness about his eyes which bespoke great excitement—he sat gallantly in his saddle—the haughty charger neighed and curvetted as it sniffed the morning air. He divided his army into three columns, and these solid bodies he flanked with light infantry, who were armed with bows, and steel cross-bows. The adventurers he left to the command of their own leaders, placing himself at the head of his own Norman soldiers. When all was ready for action, he addressed them nearly as follows—for the meaning has been better preserved than the precise words he uttered.

“Fight your best, and put every one to death; for if we conquer, we shall all be rich. What I gain, you gain; if I conquer, you conquer; if I take the land, you will share it: know, however, that I am not come here merely to take that which is my due, but to revenge our whole nation for the felon acts, perjuries, and treason of these English. They put to death the Danes, men and women, on the night of Saint Brice. They decimated the companions of my relation Alfred, and put him to death. On, then, in God’s name, and chastise them for all their misdeeds.”*

There is scarcely throughout the whole range of English history a more cruel and merciless command to be found than this which issued from the lips of the vindictive Norman. Slay, spare not, and take possession, is the sum and substance of his speech. As for his pretended sympathy for the Danes, we have proof that after the battle they were doomed to share the same misery and death which alighted upon the Saxons. But unerring justice at last avenged these wrongs, and there were but few death-beds more melancholy than that of William the Norman. On the opposite hill the Saxons were also ranged ready for the combat. They were drawn up in a compact, wedge-like body behind their palisades and trenches; the foremost rank, which consisted of the warlike men of Kent, standing shoulder to shoulder, and shield to shield. Beside the Saxon standard stood Harold and his two brothers, Gurth and Leofwin,

* Thierry’s Norman Conquest, vol. i. p. 175.

supported by the most renowned of the Saxon chiefs. They were surrounded by the brave citizens of London, a select portion of whom formed the king's body-guard. As the Normans advanced, they uttered their war-cry of "God help us! God help us!" To which the Saxons answered, "The Holy Cross! The Cross of God!" The staff which supported the Saxon banner was planted in the ground, for on that day there remained not an idle hand to bear it. On its folds were emblazoned the figure of a man in combat, woven in threads of gold and jewels, which glittered in the morning sun. A Norman, named Taillefer, who on that day played the part of both warrior and minstrel, advanced first, chaunting the ballad of Charlemagne and Roland; and as he continued to sing, and urge his charger onward, he threw up his sword in the air, and caught it in his right hand, while the Norman chivalry joined in the burthen of the song. The minstrel obtained permission to strike the first blow, and, having slain one Saxon, and felled another to the ground, he was, while in the act of attacking a third, himself mortally wounded. Before the ranks closed, William glanced his eye up the neighbouring slope, which was filled with armed men, and inquired of a warrior who rode near him, if he knew which was the spot that Harold occupied. The soldier pointed to where the Saxon standard was stationed near the summit of the hill, as being the spot most likely to be occupied by the English king. William appeared surprised that Harold was present at the conflict, muttered something about the oath which he had extracted from him, and said that his perjury would be that day punished.

The Saxons had no cavalry; all who had joined Harold on horseback, dismounted, to fight on foot, following the example which the king himself had set them. The general action was commenced by the archers first discharging their arrows, and the cross-bowmen their heavy headed bolts; but these the Saxons either received upon their shields, or they fell nearly harmless upon the defences they had hastily thrown up; no effect was produced: scarcely a wavering motion was seen along the front of that impenetrable phalanx. The Norman infantry armed with lances, and the well-mounted cavalry next advanced, to the very foot of the Saxon trenches; but the Saxons hewed off the heads of their javelins, and cut through the Norman coats of mail with a single blow of their heavy battleaxes. They had

also prepared themselves with heavy stones, which they hurled at the invaders. Many of the Normans fell in the first charge ; but all their attempts to carry the redoubts were useless: they might as well have wheeled up their horses against the great cliffs which overlook our sea-girt coast, and tried to bear them down, as to make any impression upon that brave band, who stood shoulder to shoulder, as if they were consolidated into one mass. Breathless and wearied, the Normans fell back again upon the main body, which was commanded by the duke, who had beheld with astonishment the impenetrable front which the Saxons presented.

Having recovered from the disorder, the duke commanded a large body of archers to advance, and instead of shooting forward to discharge their arrows higher in the air, so that in their descent they might gall the Saxons by wounding them in the face, neck, or shoulders. This discharge was seconded by the advance of the infantry and cavalry, without producing any serious effect. A few of the Saxons were wounded by this manœuvre, but the cavalry were still unable to break through the English line, and when they again retreated, they were driven into a deep ravine, the edge of which appears to have been covered with the natural growth of brushwood, and here many of the Norman chivalry perished; for the Saxons pursued them, and with their heavy battleaxes, which they wielded with both hands, speedily put to death such as they had unhorsed, who were unable to escape. Up to this time the Saxons had succeeded in beating off the enemy. The left wing of the Norman army gave way, and were pursued by the English. Terror and dismay reigned in the ranks of the invaders—all was confusion and flight; and to add to the consternation, a rumour ran along the line, that duke William was slain. But the duke himself appeared at this critical moment, and turned the tide of battle. It is very probable that, during this confusion and retreat, the horse which the duke rode was killed under him, and that some of the soldiers who witnessed his fall, spread the tidings that he was slain.

Behold him again mounted—his helmet off—his teeth clenched—his brows knit together—and his countenance burning with high indignation, as with his weapon he strikes at his own soldiers, who are hurrying past him in the retreat and confusion, exclaiming, in a voice of thunder, which rings out above the

clang of arms, and the groans of the wounded and the dying—"I am here—look at me—I still live—by the help of God I will yet conquer—what madness induces you to fly?—what way is there for you to escape?—they whom you are driving and destroying, if you choose, you may kill like cattle—you fly from victory—you run upon ruin—and if you retreat will all perish." Between each sentence he struck at those who continued to rush past him with his lance, until, having checked many of the fugitives, he placed himself helmetless at their head, and compelled the Saxons to hasten back again to the main body of their army. Although many of the English fell in this charge, they gained an advantage over their enemies, and there is but little doubt, had they continued to act upon the defensive, confining themselves to their entrenchments, or only sallying out when they saw the Norman line giving way, that weak as they were in numbers, they would at last have obtained the victory; for in spite of this desperate charge, headed by the duke himself, and all the force that he could bring to bear upon the front of the Saxon army, they remained firm as a rock, and not a breach could be made in that wall of iron-armed and lion-hearted Englishmen. The archers continued to discharge their arrows in the air, but where they alighted no gap was visible—there was the same firm front—the same wedge-like mass—the unaltered array of shields—the deep range of firm figures rising above one another, which displayed neither fear nor defeat, but stood grim, unmoved, and resolved; strong pillars, that can neither be made to bend nor bow, until the building which they support is destroyed, and they themselves lay broken and shapeless amid the ruins. Such was the power duke William had still to contend with.

The battle had already lasted above six hours; it was now three o'clock, and all the success the Normans had hitherto obtained was when they so suddenly rallied, and drove back the Saxons within their entrenchments. Wearied with the stubborn resistance which they displayed, the duke had at last recourse to a stratagem, and ordered a thousand horse, under the command of Eustace, count of Boulogne, to advance to the edge of the Saxon lines, assail them, and then suddenly retreat as if in disorder. This manœuvre was successful; numbers of the Saxons rushed out eagerly in the pursuit. Another body of Norman horse stood ready to dash in between the Saxons and separate them

from the main body, who still stood firm behind the entrenchments. They were also hemmed in by the enemy's infantry, and thus jammed between horse and foot, they had no longer room to wield their heavy battle-axes, which required both hands; and few of that brave band, who had so rashly sallied out upon the Normans, lived to boast of the deeds which they had achieved. Not one surrendered—no quarter was given—none asked—there was no eye, excepting the enemy's, to look upon their valorous deeds—no one to record the brave defence they made: Death alone was able to vanquish them, and there they lay, grim and silent trophies of his victory. Many a Saxon thane distinguished himself by his individual prowess, and one among the rest achieved such deeds with his battle-axe, that the dead lay piled around him like a wall—but the long lances of the Normans at last reached him; he fell, and not even his name has been preserved. Twice or thrice was this manœuvre repeated towards the close of the day, and each time accompanied with the same success; for the Saxons now burned to revenge the death of their countrymen—they rushed out of their entrenchments—they attacked the Normans hand to hand—they plunged into the very thickest of the danger. Those who were wounded still fought with one hand resting upon their shields, while those who were dying strove with their last breath to animate their countrymen. It is not certain whether Harold was slain before or after the attack was made upon the Saxon standard. It was, however, late in the day when he fell; his brain pierced by a random arrow which one of the Norman archers had shot, which goes far to prove that his death took place before the enemy had broken through the Saxon fortifications. He had distinguished himself by his bravery and firmness throughout the day; had placed himself in the most dangerous positions, and by his personal exertions set an example of valour and vigilance to his soldiers.

After the Normans had broken through the entrenchments, the English still closed firmly around their standard, which was defended to the last by the brothers of Harold, Gurth and Leofwin, and many of the English thanes; who, though hemmed round by the enemy, resolved not to resign their banner, while an arm remained capable of striking a blow in its defence. Once Robert Fitz-Ernest, a Norman knight, approached so near that he was within a few inches of grasping it, when he was laid

dead by a single blow from a battle-axe. A score of the Normans then pledged themselves solemnly to carry off the standard, or perish. It was in this struggle that both the brothers of Harold fell. Nor was the Saxon ensign torn down, and the banner which had been consecrated by the pope raised in its place, until many of the Norman knights were slain, who had sworn to achieve so perilous a triumph. The sun was setting as the Saxon standard was lowered. It was the last hard-fought field over which the banner of Alfred floated; though many a contest afterwards took place between the invaders and the English—yet this was the great struggle.

“The wreck of the English army,” says Thierry, “without chief and without standard, prolonged the struggle till the end of the day, until it was so dark and late, that the combatants only recognised each other by their language. Then, and not till then, did this desperate resistance end. Harold’s followers dispersed, many dying upon the roads of their wounds, and the fatigue of the combat. The Norman horse pursued them, granting quarter to none.” During the day, the duke of Normandy had three horses killed under him, and though he himself escaped without a wound, his helmet bore the dint of a heavy blow he had received from a battle-axe, that, but for the finely tempered steel of which the casque was made, would have left him to sleep his last sleep on the same battle-field where Harold the Saxon reposed. Many of the Saxons dispersed, and escaped through the woods which lay in the rear of their broken encampment. They were pursued by the Normans, but wherever a little body of the defeated had congregated they made a stand, and many a Norman fell that night in the moonlight combat, or returned wounded and bleeding to the camp, who had escaped the edges of the Saxon battle-axes during the day. “Thus,” says an old writer, “was tried by the great assize of God’s judgment in battle, the right of power between the English and Norman nations; a battle the most memorable of all others; and howsoever miserably lost, yet most nobly fought on the part of England.”

“If,” says Sharon Turner, “William’s wishes had been fulfilled, and he had appeared in England a month earlier than he did, he would have invaded Harold before the king of Norway attacked him, and perhaps have shared his fate. For if the English king, with the disadvantages of a loss and desertion

of his veteran troops, of new levies of an inferior force was yet able to balance the conflict with William's most concentrated, select, and skilfully exerted strength, until night was closing; if the victory was only decided by his casual death, how different would have been the issue if Harold had met him with the troops which he marched against the Norwegians! But Providence had ordained that a new dynasty should give new manners, new connexions, and new fortunes to the English nation."

Alas! for them—not us. Better would it have been had the whole Saxon race perished in the battle-field, than that a remnant should have survived to groan beneath the weight of the Norman yoke. They were alone happy who perished in the combat. We feel more pity for those who were left behind, and had to endure the miseries that followed, than we do for the dead, though all have, ages ago, been at rest. They have ceased "moaningly to crave household shelter;" the "wintry winds" will sweep over their graves no more, for even the last hillocks that covered their remains are swept away, and they have, centuries ago, mingled dust with dust; on the wide field not a human bone can now be found, of "those who fought and those who fell."

The solemn Sabbath day that dawned upon that battle-ground saw the Norman Conqueror encamped amidst the living and the dead. And when he called over the muster-roll which had been prepared before he left the opposite coast, many a knight, who on the day when he sailed, had proudly answered to his name, was then numbered with the dead. The land which he had done homage for was useless to him then. He had perilled his life, and a few feet of common earth was all the reward that death allotted to him. The conqueror had lost nearly a fourth of his army—a number, from all we can gather, equal to the whole of the Saxon force engaged in the field. Those who survived received for their share of the victory the spoils of the slaughtered Saxons. The dead body of Harold is said to have laid long upon the field before any one ventured to claim it, but at length his mother, the widow of Earl Godwin, ventured forth, and craved permission to bury it. It is said that she offered to give the Norman duke the weight of his body in gold, but that he sternly refused to grant her request; and, in his savage triumph, exclaimed, "He shall have no other sepulchre than the sand upon the sea-shore." He, however, relented at

last, says Thierry, "if we are to believe an old tradition, in favour of the monks of Waltham abbey, which Harold had founded and enriched. Two Saxon monks, Osgod and Ailrik, deputed by the abbot of Waltham, demanded and obtained permission to transport the remains of their benefactor to their church. They sought among the mass of slain, despoiled of arms and clothes, examining them carefully one after the other, but could not recognise the body of him they sought, so much had his wounds disfigured him. Despairing ever to succeed in their research unaided, they addressed themselves to a woman whom Harold, before he became king, had kept as a mistress, and intreated her to assist them. She was called Edith, and surnamed the Beauty with the Swan's Neck. She consented to accompany the two monks, and was more successful than they in discovering the corpse of him whom she loved."

Although the Saxon throne was for ever overthrown, many a struggle took place, and many a concession was made, before England was wholly in the hands of the Normans. Here, however, the gates of history close upon our Saxon forefathers for a long period. Their language has outlived that of the Conqueror's; and we shall find that our island again became Saxon, and that the laws of Edward the Confessor had to be restored before the country could be tranquillized:—

"For freedom's battle once begun,
Bequeathed by bleeding sire to son,
Though baffled oft, is ever **won**."



Discovery of the body of Harlowe

The Anglo-Saxons.

THEIR RELIGION.

WE have already described the paganism of the Saxons, both as it existed on the Continent, and after their arrival in England; and we must now glance briefly at their change to Christianity, and the early modes of worship which they adopted. When they landed in England, they found the Britons generally worshippers of the True Divinity. Christianity had become grafted and grown, and overpowered and bore down the remains of druidism, on which it was first planted. The idolatry that existed had assumed a more classic form; and instead of the grim wicker idols of the druids, the slightly forms of the heathen gods, which the Romans worshipped, had usurped their places. Among the ancient Cymry who had not come into such close contact with the Roman conquerors, the old druidical forms of idolatry still lingered; though through them we are enabled to catch faint glimpses of the Deity, and to discover a slow, but sure approach towards the Creator. We have already shown how the Saxon invasion checked the progress of Christianity—how the churches were overthrown, and the priests massacred, until pope Gregory sent over Augustin, who succeeded in converting the Saxon king, Ethelbert, to the religion of Christ. How Paulinus accompanied Edilburga into Northumbria, and Edwin, the king of the Deira and Bernicia, became a convert to the holy faith. We have shown how the abbey of Croyland rose up amid the wild marshes of Lincolnshire, and the gospel sound was carried through the vast territory of Mercia, until at last the whole of the Saxon Octarchy bowed before the image of the dying Redeemer. To the forms of worship which were adopted in these ancient Christian churches, we must now turn.

A rude wooden cross, planted by the roadside, a humble cell scooped out of the rock, or a wattled shed, thatched with the tufted rushes or the broad-leaved water-flags, first marked the

places of worship of the primitive Christians. Some came over, and settled down upon waste and lonely places; their piety and peaceful habits soon attracted the attention of the neighbouring peasantry, and of the chief, who granted them permission to reside and build upon the soil; allowed them to fell timber in the adjacent forest, or to hew stone from the distant quarry. Nor were they long in procuring assistance; many came and laboured for the love of God; they dug foundations; they mixed cement; the trees were sawn, and squared into beams; a forge was erected, and, as the blue smoke curled above the landscape, the clattering of the brawny smith was heard upon the anvil, as, with his "buck-horn fist," he shaped the iron which bound together beam and rafter. At length a tower rose up above the wild waste of marshes, and morning, and evening, and often at intervals during the day, the little bell was heard to toll; and as the sound fell upon the wayfarer's ears who journeyed past, he thought of life, and death, and heaven. Vast estates were at length given to them; they received rich donations, houses, and lands, and forests, which were secured by grants and charters, and attested by the signatures of kings. These bequests were made from love—and fear—a hope to escape future punishments, and by the intercession of the priests to enter heaven.

Thus was a door thrown open, into which good and evil were promiscuously admitted. The truly pious, and the hardened sinner, received alike encouragement—bells were rung, and masses said, no matter for whom, as long as the altar was piled high with treasure—and mankind were at last wrongfully taught, that forgiveness could be purchased by wealth. Still the knee had to be bended, and prayers offered up, penances performed, and fastings endured, before the conscientious priest promised to intercede for the sinner. Then instead of the wooden cross, the naked walls, and the floor strewn with rushes, woven tapestry, and glaring pictures, graven images, and relics of saints, costly vessels of gold and silver, rich vestments and dazzling gems, and all the glitter and pomp which had hitherto been confined to courts, or borne in triumphal processions, were called up to decorate the buildings dedicated to God. In place of the lowly dwelling, scarcely distinguishable from the thatched hut of the peasant that rose above the waste, mighty fabrics were erected by skilful architects, whose roofs seemed to rest on the rim of the horizon, and the traveller looked in vain for those

beautiful openings in the landscape which had so long been familiar to his eye. Mighty barons, who had distinguished themselves in many a hard-fought field, became abbots; kings laid aside their costly robes, their crowns, and sceptres, put on the grey homely serge of the pilgrim, and, with staff in hand, journeyed weary miles to kneel before the shrines of saints, and either left their bones to moulder in a foreign land, or returned home again to die in the quiet solitude of the cloister—leaving miles of hill and vale, and wood and river, to enrich the revenues of the grey abbey in which they expired, amid the shady sadness of long-embowered aisles.

These religious houses were happy havens for the poor and needy, the hungry, the wretched, and the oppressed. They became landmarks to the sick, storm-tossed, and rain-drenched wayfarer. All who came thither were sheltered and relieved; none were sent away empty-handed; for spiritual and bodily comfort were alike administered to all. They were the only resting places where the traveller could halt, and find refreshment and welcome, where his steed was stabled, his wants attended to, and where, without charge, he was dismissed on the morrow with a prayer and a blessing. Nor did their works of charity end here: they sent out missionaries to other countries, to the benighted land from which their ancestors first came, over the sounding billows, to many a shore whose echoes had never yet rung back the holy hallelujah. Although there were many things in their ancient forms of worship which in us awaken a sigh or a smile, we must remember that religion was then in its infancy—that they had but few guides, but few books to instruct them. There were but few able to translate the gospels from the Latin into the Saxon tongue; such versions as they were enabled to make were crude and incorrect, and many of the priests were incompetent to instruct them in points of faith. They ventured but little further in their instruction than to teach that the soul was immortal, and lived in a future state, where the good were rewarded, and the evil punished; that Christ died for our salvation—that the dead arose, and the faithful and just would at last be admitted into eternal glory. Into the more intricate mysteries of our religion they ventured not. Every priest was commanded to read the gospels, and to study well the Holy Book, that “he might teach his people rightly, who looked up to him.” Several valu-

able MSS. of the translation of the gospel into the Saxon language, which were written between the reigns of Alfred and Harold, are still in existence. Although they used the cross as the sign of their salvation, they were taught not to reverence the wood, but to bear in mind His form who had suffered upon it. They held relics in high veneration; and though the remains of good and holy men cannot be contemplated without awakening a religious feeling, they carried their reverence to a superstitious excess; for by them they believed that the greatest miracles could be worked, and that they were the only safeguards against disease, magic, and witchcraft. The priests were only allowed to celebrate mass when fasting; nor, unless in cases of sickness, was this ceremony to be held anywhere but upon the altar in the church; and to this altar no woman was permitted to approach during its celebration; neither dogs nor swine were allowed to come within the enclosure that surrounded the holy edifice. The purest of bread, wine, and water, were only to be used in celebrating the Eucharist, and the sacramental cup was to be formed of gold, or silver, glass, or tin; and none made of earth or wood were permitted to be used. The altar was always to be kept clean, and covered; and the mass-priest was to have his missal, his psalter, his reading-book, penitential, numeral, hand-book, and singing-book. He was also to learn some handicraft, and to abolish all witchcraft. Each priest performed his allotted duty; the ostiary guarded the church doors, and tolled the bell; the exorcist drove out devils, and sprinkled houses which were infested with witches and foul fiends, with abyssum; the lector read the gospels to the congregation; the acolyth held the tapers while the lector read; the deacon attended on the mass-priest, placed the oblations on the altar, baptized children, and administered the Eucharist to the people; the sub-deacon had charge of the holy vessels, and waited at the altar while the mass-priest preached and consecrated the Eucharist. The bishop was looked up to as a comforter to the wretched, and a father to the poor; the priests were forbidden to carry their controversies before a lay tribunal, and when they could not settle it amongst themselves, it was left to the decision of the bishop. The high-born were taught not to despise those that were lowly; they were ordered to teach youth with care—to give alms, and chaunt holy hymns during the distribution; to humble themselves, and to become examples of mildheartedness.

Many of the penances they inflicted were severe; he who was guilty of any heinous offence, was to lay aside his weapons, travel barefooted many weary miles, nor seek household shelter during the night. He was to pay no regard to his dress, nor to enter a bath, neither might he eat flesh, nor taste strong drink, but fast, watch, and pray, both by day and night. The wealthy, however, might evade the heaviest penances, by giving alms; and the following extract will show to what useful purposes the church applied these penalties:—

“He that hath ability may raise a church to the praise of God, and if he has wherewithal, let him give land to it, and allow ten young men, so that they may serve in it, and minister the daily service. He may repair churches where he can, and make folk-ways, with bridges over deep waters, and over miry places; assist poor men’s widows, step-children, and foreigners. He may free his own slaves, and redeem the liberty of those who belong to other masters, and especially the poor captives of war. He may feed the needy, house them, clothe and warm them, and give them baths and beds.”

Thus did our pious ancestors make crime administer to the wants of the poor; they filtered the pure waters of charity from these corrupt sources, and displayed a wisdom which our modern legislators have yet to be taught.

GOVERNMENT AND LAWS.

When the Saxons first landed in England they could have had no previous knowledge of the Roman laws, which were then in existence in our island; for the government of the conquerors had long overthrown the primitive customs which were in use among the ancient Britons before the landing of Julius Cæsar. We have already shown that the earliest of our Saxon invaders were led on by some military chief, who claimed his descent from Odin, and was acknowledged as leader by the consent of his followers, also allowed the largest share of the plunder or captives which were taken in war. Thus it would naturally follow, that when they came to settle down upon the soil which they had conquered, the power of the military chief would soon be acknowledged, and that to him would be given the greatest portion of the land; while amongst his followers such shares would be distributed as were considered proportionate to their

rank. After having conquered and divided the land, they would naturally unite together to defend the possessions they had won, and the chief, or his descendant,—if found worthy of being still retained at their head, by his wisdom or valour—would, either in peace or war, continue to hold the title and power of ruler; and thus would governments be formed, thrones established, and laws made by the wealthy and powerful, to keep their followers and captives in subjection. Nor would it be probable in all instances that the conquered were made captives. Many by their valour and opposition would still present a formidable front to the invaders; and as both parties would in time grow weary of a continued system of attack or defence, concessions would be made, peace agreed upon, the land divided, vows sworn, and penalties fixed, to be paid by those who first broke the treaty. In such cases, war would not be entered into by either party without their first stating the grievances. This, again, would lead to discussions, assemblies, accusations, defences; times and places would be allotted for meeting; and so courts and tribunals were formed; and thus in all countries did law and civilization commence. We have shown how England was at first divided into separate kingdoms; how chief after chief came over, fought, conquered, and established a separate state, until the Octarchy was formed; and that when the whole island was occupied, the Saxon kings began to make war upon each other, until state after state was subdued, and one king at last reigned over all. That governors had to be placed over different divisions of this vast extent of territory; that these, again, placed officers over the sub-divisions: thus there were earls or aldermen, sheriffs, or shrieves, officers to each hundred or tithing; headboroughs, frankpledges, who attended the court-leet which was held at given periods, and accounted for all grievances or violations of the law. The first laws made would naturally be those which protected persons and property,—to punish acts of violence and theft, and to prevent personal vengeance being inflicted. Thus, murder might be compounded for, under certain circumstances, at a fixed penalty, and every portion of the body injured had its price, from the leg to the little finger, even down to the hair, tooth, or nail. The loss of an eye and a leg appears to have been considered the most important, and was punished by a fine of fifty shillings. To lame a person only, the sum exacted was thirty shillings. To wound, or strike such a blow

as caused deafness, twenty-five shillings; for fracturing the skull, twenty shillings; for cutting off the little finger, eleven shillings; tearing off the hair, ten shillings. For tearing off a nail, or driving out a tooth, the penalty was one shilling; but if a front tooth, the charge was six shillings. Robbery was punished according to the rank of the party plundered. If a freeman committed robbery, he forfeited all his goods and his freedom; if he was taken in the fact, and the stolen property found in his hand, the king had the option of killing him, of selling him, or receiving the value of his Were, which was the sum at which his life would have been rated had he been murdered. Even the life of the king had its Were or value. One hundred and twenty pounds was the price fixed to be paid as the penalty for the murder of a king. A noble's, a bishop's, an alderman's, a thane's, a servant's, had each its fixed penalty, according to the rank of the deceased,—from that of the king, as above named, to the humblest hind, whose life was rated at thirty shillings. Besides the Were, there was another protection, called the Mund. This seems to have been a penalty paid for disturbing the peace of a man's household; or, as Sharon Turner has observed, "it was a privilege which made every man's house his castle." The Saxons had also their bail or sureties. Thus, when a man had committed homicide, he had to find borh, or sureties for the payment of the penalty. The time allowed for payment is not mentioned, excepting in one case, where it appears to have been limited to forty days. The head of every tithing, or ten families, also appears to have been responsible for those under his jurisdiction or keeping, as we have previously shown in the reign of Alfred. He who had no surety, or borh, or could not pay the penalty for the crime committed, or had no kinsman to redeem him, either became a slave, or might be slain, according to the nature of the offence.

Their mode of trial was very simple, and their general method of arriving at the innocence or guilt of the party accused appears to have been influenced by the number and respectability of the witnesses who swore for or against the prisoner. Thus, if a man stood charged with any offence, and he could bring the given number of persons to swear that he was innocent, the prisoner was acquitted, unless the accusing party could produce a greater number of witnesses to swear against him, and show clearer proofs of his guilt. When this was the case, the offender either

submitted to the punishment or underwent the trial of ordeal, or, as it was considered, submitted to the "judgment of God." The ordeal consisted either of hot water or hot iron; in some cases the iron weighed three pounds, and was to be carried nine paces. The ordeal appears to have taken place in the church; if the trial was to be by hot iron, a number of men were allowed to enter the church, and, being ranged on each side, the priest sprinkled them with holy water; they were then to kiss the Gospel, and were signed with the cross. The priest afterwards read a prayer, and during this period the fire was not to be mended, and if burnt out the iron still rested upon the staples to cool, so that in no instance could it be red-hot; the paces were measured by the feet of the accused, and it has been computed that the hot iron would hardly remain in his hand beyond two seconds. Whether the culprit moved rapidly or walked slowly, or threw the iron upon the floor, or placed it on some allotted spot, we cannot tell; though there is but little doubt that means were taken to render the trial as short as possible. When the ordeal was by water, it was sufficient if four witnesses stepped forward to state that they had seen it boiling; whether the vessel was of iron, copper, or clay, a stone was placed in it, which the accused with his bare hand and arm had to take out; the vessel was shallow or deep, according to the nature of the offence he stood charged with; in some cases he had only to plunge in his hand to take out the stone, in others his arm to the elbow. As in the ordeal by heated iron, the same ceremonies were observed, and during the time that elapsed in praying and sprinkling the witnesses the fire was not allowed to be mended; while the act took place, a prayer was offered up to God to discover the truth. When the trial was over, the hand or arm was bound up, and the bandages were not removed until the expiration of three days. It does not appear that the marks of burning or scalding were the tests of guilt; it was only when the wounds were found foul and unhealed that the accused was pronounced guilty; if they looked healthy and well, and were nearly healed, it was considered a proof of innocence. It will be readily imagined that few who were guilty would willingly undergo such a trial, for it must be borne in mind that punishment still followed; and when the signs were unfavourable, there can be but little doubt after so solemn a ceremony that the penalty the accused was doomed to suffer must have been severe. It could, however, like homicide,



Trial by Ordeal.

be compounded for; and capital punishment seems seldom to have taken place amongst the Saxons, unless the crime was committed in open day, and the culprit was caught in the fact, or under such circumstances as were considered too clear to need any trial; in such cases, vengeance was generally taken on the spot, and the robber or murderer was either hanged upon the nearest tree, or slain where he was captured—no evidence was required,—no defence was allowed.

There were two other forms of ordeal, called the cross and the corsned; the former consisted of two pieces of wood, which were covered over, one bearing the mark of the cross; if the accused drew this, he was considered innocent; if the piece that was unmarked, guilty. The other consisted in swallowing a piece of bread which the priest had blessed; if it stuck in the throat, or the culprit turned pale, or trembled, or had a difficulty in swallowing it, he stood condemned. Besides fines, many of the punishments they inflicted were severe; they used the whip and the heated brand, mutilated the face, imprisoned, banished, sentenced the guilty to slavery, or doomed them to suffer imprisonment, while their capital punishments appear to have been hanging and stoning to death. The land was divided into what was called "folkland" and "bocland." The folkland was such as belonged to the king and the people; that which was held by agreement or charter was called "bocland," or land made over by agreement of the book, or some written instrument, though conveyances of land were sometimes made by the delivery of an arrow, a spear, or any other object. The king had, however, his bocland or private property, as is proved by the will of king Alfred; and the word folkland in time was changed to crownland, which, no doubt, means that the wastes and commons which the people were allowed to make use of, and were not private property, were considered to belong to the king or the state. Boclands appear originally only to have been granted during the life of the holder. It was the work of time and the change of events which caused them to become hereditary. The Saxons were divided into many classes or ranks; first stood the king, then the earls, nobles, or chiefs; then came the other class of small landed proprietors; and below these another grade, whom we may term freemen; the theows, ceorls, or villains, came last, and were slaves of the soil; if the estate changed hands, the theow went to the next owner; on no account could he re-

move from the land; he was, however, protected, and, so long as he did his duty, could not be removed by the owner; neither could more than a regular portion of labour be exacted from him; but we have before alluded to his privileges in the laws of Ina. The ceremonies used at their witenagemotes, guilds, moots, and other courts, are matters of law rather than subjects suited to a narrative and picturesque history of England.

LITERATURE.

We have no proof that the early pagan Saxons possessed an alphabet, or had any acquaintance with a written language, until the introduction of Christianity; for, unlike the Britons, they had not the enlightened Romans to instruct them. Even as late as Alfred's time, we have shown that but few of the English chiefs could either read or write; and we find Wihtred, king of Kent, as long after the Saxon invasion as the year 700, unable to affix his signature to a charter, but causing some scribe, who had probably drawn up the document, to add as an explanation to the royal mark, that "I, Wihtred, king of Kent, have put this sign of the holy cross to the charter, on account of my ignorance of writing." As the Saxons were the avowed enemies of the ancient Cymry, and came amongst them only to slay, destroy, and take possession of the land, it is easy to account for the length of time that must have elapsed before the Britons would impart the knowledge they had gathered from the Romans to their Saxon conquerors.

One of the earliest histories we possess is that to which the name of Gildas is affixed, who appears, however, to have belonged to the Cymry, and to have had a brother at that period who was celebrated as one of the Welsh bards. To him we have already alluded; also to Nennius, who is said to have been one of the monks of Bangor, and to have had a narrow escape from the massacre, in which so many of his brethren perished. To his early history of Britain we have before alluded. Columbanus, a celebrated Irishman, who died in Italy about the year 615, appears to have been well acquainted with both the Greek and Hebrew languages. Literature at this period seems to have been confined principally to the monasteries; and towards the close of the sixth century, we find Aldhelm, an abbot of Malmsbury, celebrated for his Latin writings. "But his mean-

ing," says Sharon Turner, "is clouded by gorgeous rhetoric: his style an endless tissue of figures, which he never leaves till he has converted every metaphor into a simile, and every simile into a wearisome episode." But the venerable Bede's is the most distinguished name amongst the early Anglo-Saxon writers. He also wrote in Latin, and his ecclesiastical history of England still stands as the chief authority, whence we derive the clearest knowledge of the manners and customs of the early Anglo-Saxons. He was born about 670, or 680, at a village named Yarrow, which stands near the mouth of the Tyne, and was educated at the neighbouring monastery of Wearmouth. He was acquainted with Egbert, the learned archbishop of York, to whom he addressed a letter, which is still extant. Egbert left behind him a famous library, mention of which is made by the celebrated Alcuin, who proposed to Charlemagne that the boys he was educating should be sent out of France, to "copy and carry back the flowers of Britain, that the garden might not be shut up in York, but the fruits of it placed in the paradise of Tours." Though both writing in the same language, and about the same period, no two authors out of the thousands who have since lived and written, have ever exhibited a greater contrast in the style of composition than that which exists between the writings of Aldhelm and Bede. "The style of Bede," says Turner, "in all his works, is plain and unaffected. Attentive only to his matter, he had little solicitude for the phrase in which he dressed it; but, though seldom eloquent, and often homely, it is clear, precise, and useful." Alfred was the first who translated the works of Bede into Saxon, and made them familiar to his subjects. Alcuin, who speaks so highly of the library collected at York by the archbishop Egbert, was sent on an embassy by Offa, surnamed the Terrible, to Charlemagne. Alcuin was a pupil of Bede's, and a native of Northumbria; and while he resided in France, he was instrumental in persuading the emperor to collect many valuable manuscripts. His works seem to have been written for the use and instruction of his friend and patron, the emperor Charlemagne; and, though highly valuable in their day, they lack that living spirit which was infused into the writings of Bede.

But few of the civilized nations of Europe possess works which will bear comparison with those produced by our early Saxon writers; nor has any other of the Gothic tribes, from

which our old Germanic language sprung, a literature of so old a date, that in any way approaches to the perfection attained by the early Anglo-Saxons. What we possess is wonderful, considering the short time that elapsed from the first introduction of letters amongst the Saxons, to the troubles which followed the Danish invasion, when so many monasteries and libraries were destroyed by those illiterate but brave barbarians. The first business of the Saxons, after they had ceased fighting, and settled down in England, would be to build and plant; and much time and labour would be required in erecting their habitations, preparing a supply of food, and defending their possessions in a new and hostile country, before they would be enabled to find leisure to direct their thoughts to literature, or do anything more than establish those civil institutions which were necessary for the protection of the colony. They had that work to do which we find ready done to our own hands; fields to inclose, and roads to make; and even the monks to whom we are indebted for our earliest writings were at first compelled to assist in building the monasteries they wrote in, and to cultivate the waste lands which lay around them: yet, in spite of these drawbacks, what wonderful progress was made in literature by the close of the reign of Alfred! Though illiterate, the early Saxons were a highly intelligent race: look at the speech of the chieftain we have already quoted in the reign of Edwin, the king of Deiri—the beautiful and applicable imagery of the bird, the warm hall it enters in winter, and the cold and darkness, which is compared to death, that reigns without; all evince a fine appreciation of the true elements which constitute poetry; yet we have no doubt in our own minds that this heathen orator could neither read nor write. When the Saxons once turned their attention to letters, none of the barbarous nations excelled them—the progress made during the reign of Alfred, we again repeat, is marvellous.

Nothing can be more primitive than our Anglo-Saxon poetry. Every line bears the stamp of originality. The praise of brave warriors is ever the subject. It has always been the same. They but extolled what then stood highest in their estimation—the brave—the giver of rewards—the terror of enemies—the leader of battles are but the plaudits of men put into metre—the natural outbreak of admiration. Watch a fond mother when

alone, talking to her infant—nature is still the same—she addresses it as her darling, her dearest, her life, her delight; and when she has exhausted every endearing epithet—uttered every fond word that her heart dictated, she evinces her affection by caresses. To what lengths could we extend the comparison! But neither mother nor child in those days called forth the lavish praises which were expended on a brave chieftain. We need only refer to the extracts we have already given in the body of our history, from the Welsh bards, to prove this. The literature in no country was ever built upon so original a foundation as that of the Anglo-Saxons. Their language at an early period was enriched by the Danish: their habits resembled those of the sea-kings. Long before the Norman conquest, they had melted into one; the sea-horses, and the road of the swans, were to them familiar images; there was a sublimity about the ocean, and the storm, and the giant headlands, which they felt and understood; and had we the space, we could fill pages with proofs of this grand poetical appreciation—of this natural inspiration. The Saxon ode which celebrates Athelstan's victory at Brunansburgh bears evidence of the fiery spirit which the Scandinavians diffused. Neither drew from the classic stores of Rome or Greece.

Their homilies and graver works scarcely come within the compass of our history; they require more serious treatment than we are able to bestow upon them. Those attributed to Alfric are now on the eve of becoming widely known; and we doubt not but that, in the course of time, the study of the Anglo-Saxon language will be pursued by every man who aspires to literature. A few days' attention to it, renders the reading of Chaucer easy; and although it may be long before the student is enabled to decypher an old Saxon manuscript, yet he will be rewarded by the facility with which he will get through our early stores of black-letter lore.

Ballads were sung in the English streets before the time of Alfred. Our music and singing-parties are nothing new. More than a thousand years ago, the harp sounded in the festal hall, accompanied by the voice of the singer. Look at the beauty of the following extract. It is an old Saxon ditty, and was known long before the Normans invaded England. Read it; then turn to some of our specimens of modern versification. The exile is

banished from his friends, and encounters many hardships. He is doomed to dwell in a cave within the forest; and thus he complains:—

This earthly dwelling is cold, and I am weary;
 The mountains are high up, the dells are gloomy,
 Their streets full of branches, roofed with pointed thorns;
 I am weary of so cheerless an abode.
 My friends are now all in the earth—
 The grave guards all that I loved;
 I alone remain above, and thitherward am I going.
 All the long summer day I sit weeping
 Under the oak tree, near my earthly cave,
 And there may I long weep.
 The exile's path still lies through a land of troubles;
 My mind knows no rest—it is the cave of care.
 Throughout life has weariness ever pursued me.

This passage wants but the polish of Shakspeare, and to be uttered by his own mournful monarch, king Richard the Second, to be worthy of a place in his immortal writings.*

ARCHITECTURE, ART, AND SCIENCE.

That the Saxons possessed considerable skill in architecture before they took possession of England, we have already shown in our description of the Pagan temple, which was erected in their own country.† It is also on record, that the Christian missionaries sent over by Pope Gregory, converted the heathen temples, which they found already erected in our island, into churches, destroying only the idols they found therein; but whether these edifices were erected by the Britons or Romans, or by the Saxons themselves, it is difficult to decide. All we know for a certainty is, that the church in which Augustin and his monks were located on their arrival at Canterbury was called an ancient British temple, and was probably built by the first Christians who were converted by the Romans. The earliest churches which the Saxons erected after their conversion to Christianity were formed of wood, and covered with thatch; and even as late as the time of Chaucer, we find mention of the

* I had marked several passages in the translated poems of Beowulf, Judith, Cedmon, &c., which would require but little alteration to insure them a place amongst our choicest extracts; but am compelled to omit them, as they would occupy too much space, and scarcely be in keeping with the character of the present work.

† See p. 61.

sacred edifices being roofed with the same substance. The celebrated cathedral of Lindisfarne could boast of no costlier material than sawn oak and a straw roof, until Eadbert, the seventh bishop, removed the thatch, and threw over the rafters a covering of lead. The minster of York, founded by Edwin, after his marriage with Edilburga, the daughter of Ethelbert, was built of stone; and as early as 669, we find mention of the windows being glazed. Prior to this period, the windows consisted of mere openings in the walls, through which the light was admitted; they were called eye-holes, and were protected by lattice-work, through which the birds flew in and out, and built inside the fabric; nor was there any other means of keeping out the rain and snow, excepting by lowering down the simple linen blinds. The few remains we possess of Saxon architecture display great strength and solidity without grace. The columns are low and massy, the arches round and heavy, seeming as if they formed a portion of the bulky pillars, instead of springing from them with that light and airy grace which is the great beauty of Gothic architecture. Their chief ornament in building appears to have been the zig-zag moulding which resembles sharks' teeth. The very word they used in describing this form of ornament also signified to gnaw or eat; and from the Saxon word *fret*, or teeth work, the common term of fret-work arose. Towards the close of the seventh century, the celebrated bishop Wilfrid, who had visited Rome, made great improvements in ecclesiastical architecture. He brought with him several eminent artists from Italy; and as he stood high in the favour of Oswy, king of the Deiri and Bernicia, he was enabled to reward his architects liberally. He restored the church which Paulinus founded at York. But the most celebrated edifice he raised, appears to have been the church at Hexham, of which the following description is given by Richard, who was the prior of Hexham, and who wrote while the building still existed about the close of the twelfth century:—"The foundations of this church," says prior Richard, "were laid deep in the earth for the crypts and oratories, and the passages leading to them, which were then with great exactness contrived and built under ground. The walls, which were of great length, and raised to an immense height, and divided into three several stories, or tiers, he supported by square and various other kinds of well-polished columns. Also, the walls, the capitals of the columns

which supported them, and the arch of the sanctuary, he decorated with historical representations, imagery, and various figures in relief, carved in stone, and painted with a most agreeable variety of colours. The body of the church he compassed about with pentices and porticoes, which, both above and below, he divided, with great and inexpressible art, by partition walls and winding stairs. Within the staircases, and above them, he caused flights of steps and galleries of stone, and several passages leading from them, both ascending and descending, to be artfully disposed, that multitudes of people might be there, and go quite round the church, without being seen by any one below in the nave." Prior Richard goes on further to state, that he also caused several altars to be erected to the blessed saints. In 767, the church of St. Peter's at York having been either damaged or destroyed by fire, was rebuilt by archbishop Albert, assisted by the celebrated Alcuin. Here, also, we find mention of lofty arches, supported on columns, of vaultings, windows, porticoes, galleries, and altars, richly ornamented. What additions the genius of Alfred made to the architecture of the period we know not. We have, however, already shown that he set apart a great portion of his revenue to the building and repairing of churches. But he lived amid stormy times, when the strengthening of military fortresses was of more consequence to the welfare of his kingdom than the erection of costly edifices; and during the ravages of the Danes the fine arts appear not to have made any advance.

We have scarcely any records of the domestic architecture of the Saxons, but may safely infer, from the simple style of their early churches, that their houses were built of wood, and thatched with reeds, and we have proof that timber houses continued until a comparatively modern period.

Of their painting and sculpture we know but little: the horn of Ulphus, which is still preserved, is beautifully carved; and we find mention of the tomb of the bishop of Hexham having been richly decorated. Their paintings seem to have been imported from Rome, and were principally pictures of saints and martyrs, which appear to have formed the most attractive ornaments in their churches. Their illuminated missals we have already alluded to. The Saxon ladies were skilful embroiderers, weavers, and spinners, arts in which the daughters of Edward the Elder excelled. Even the celebrated St.

Dunstan, with all his surliness, deigned to draw patterns for his fair countrywomen to copy in their embroidery. Among other costly gifts, mentioned in a Charter relating to Croyland Abbey, granted by a king of Mercia, we find a golden veil, on which was enwrought the famous siege of Troy. Many of the initial letters, already mentioned, are of the most intricate patterns, scroll is interlaced within scroll, chain-like links, and heads of birds and serpents, running into the most beautiful flourishes, and compelling us to admit that the Saxons were either excellent copyists, or gifted with considerable invention.

Their musical instruments consisted of horns, trumpets, flutes, drums, cymbals, a stringed instrument not unlike the violin, which was played upon with a bow, and the harp; and in their churches organs which must have shaken the sacred buildings with their powerful tones. Dunstan was celebrated for his skill upon the harp; he also made an organ with brass pipes, and made several presents of bells to the Saxon churches. From the description given of a harp in an old poem, it was made of birch-wood, with oaken keys, and strung with the long hairs pulled from the tails of horses. The cymbals were formed of mixed metals, and when played, struck on the concave side, as they are now; and Bede dwells upon their beautiful modulation in the hands of a skilful player. He describes the drum as having been made of stretched leather, fastened on rounded hoops, and which emitted a loud sound when struck—he mentions tones, and semi-tones, and thus concludes his remarks on the power of music: "Among all the sciences this is the more commendable, pleasing, courtly, mirthful, and lovely. It makes men liberal, cheerful, courteous, glad, and amiable—it rouses them to battle—it exhorts them to bear fatigue, and comforts them under labour: it refreshes the mind that is disturbed, chases away headache and sorrow, and dispels the depraved humours, and cheers the desponding spirits." We find the Saxon organs described as rising high, some having gilded pipes, and many pairs of bellows; one especially is pointed out by the monk Wolfstan, as having stood in Winchester cathedral. "Such a one," says the monk, "had never before been seen." "It seems to have been a prodigious instrument," says Sharon Turner, in a note to his History of the Anglo-Saxons. "It had twelve bellows above, and fourteen below, which were alternately worked by seventy strong men, covered with perspiration,

and emulously animating each other to impel the blast with all their strength. There were four hundred pipes, which the hand of the skilful organist shut or opened as the tune required. Two friars sat at it, whom a rector governed. It had concealed holes adopted to forty keys; they struck the seven notes of the octave, the carmine of the lyric semi-tone being mixed. It must," adds the learned historian, "have reached the full sublime of musical sound, so far as its quantity produces sublimity."

In arithmetic, they simply studied the division of even numbers, separating them into those "metaphysical distinctions of equally equal, and equally unequal," though they seem to have attained something approaching to perfection in calculation. In natural philosophy, Bede was far in advance of many of the Roman writers. In astronomy, they drew their information from such Greek and Latin treatises as chanced to fall into their hands. They believed that comets portended war, pestilence, and famine, and all those evils which the ignorant still attribute to their appearance in the present day. Of geography they knew but little, until the work of Orosius was translated by our own Alfred. They trusted to cure diseases by charms, though they were not without physicians, herbs being what they principally used for medicine; and, no doubt, many of our village herb-doctors, who trust to the full or wane of the moon, for finding the healing virtues in their favourite plants, are fair samples of the early Saxon practitioner in the same art; and that many such old books, as "The Gentlewoman's Closet," &c., contain the genuine recipes used by the Saxons. From a rare original work, in our possession, we quote the following, whose counterpart may be found in many a valuable Saxon MS.: "The sixth and tenth days of March shalt thou draw out blood of the right arm, the eleventh day of April, and in the end of May, of which arm thou wilt, and that against a fever; and if thou dost, neither shalt thou lose thy sight, nor thou shalt have no fever so long as thou livest!" He who fell sick on the first day of the month, was supposed to be in danger for three days after; on the second day, would get well; on the third, was to be ill for twenty-eight days; on the fourth, to escape; on the fifth, to suffer grievously; on the eighth, "if he be not whole on the twelfth day, he shall be dead." And so on for every day throughout the month and year.*

* "A Groat's worth of Wit." No date.

COSTUME, MANNERS, CUSTOMS, AND EVERYDAY LIFE.

Of the every-day life and domestic manners of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, we possess considerable information. partly from written records, such as charters, wills, grants, and leases, but more especially from the drawings which we find in the ancient manuscripts which are still preserved. Amongst the higher classes we discover that the walls were hung with tapestry, ornamented with gold and rich colours, for the needles of the Saxon ladies seem ever to have been employed in forming birds, animals, trees, and flowers, upon the hangings which were so necessary to keep out the wind that must have blown in at every chink of their wooden apartments. Their garments were loose and flowing, that of the men consisting of a shirt, over which they wore a coat or tunic, open at the neck and partly up the sides, having wide sleeves which reached to the wrists; and as this was ample enough to be put on by slipping it over the head, (not unlike the common frock worn by our carters or peasantry,) it was occasionally, and no doubt always in cold weather, to make it sit closer, confined to the waist by a girdle or belt. Over this they occasionally wore a short cloak, which was fastened to the breast by a brooch or loop; they also wore drawers or long hose, which were bandaged crosswise, from the ankle to the knee, with strips of coloured cloth or leather. Their shoes, which were open at the front, were secured by thongs; and though the poorer classes are sometimes represented as bare-legged, yet they are seldom drawn without shoes, which are generally painted black, while many of them wear the short stocking or sock. That their shoes were made of leather is expressly stated by Bede, who describes St. Cuthbert, as often keeping on his shoes for months together, and that it was with difficulty he could be persuaded to take them off, to permit his feet to be made clean. Hats or caps they seem rarely to have worn, although there are one or two instances in which they appear. They seem generally to have gone bareheaded, excepting when in battle; then they wore a pointed helmet. In nearly all the early illustrations, we find the hair worn long, parted in the middle, and falling down upon the neck and shoulders. The beard is also long and forked. Silk garments were not uncommon amongst the nobles: as early as the time of Ethelbert, king of Kent, mention is made of a silk dress. We also read of a

coronation garment, which was made of silk, and woven of gold and flowers. In the churches the altars were generally covered with silk, and at his death, the body of the venerable Bede was enclosed in a silken shroud. The Saxon noblemen seem to have been lavish in their ornaments, and to have worn costly bracelets on their arms, and rings upon their fingers—the ring appears to have been worn upon the third finger of the right hand—it was called the gold finger, and the penalty for cutting this off was greater than for amputating any of the other fingers. Furs of the sable, beaver, fox, martin, and other animals, were also worn, and amongst the poorer classes the skins of lambs and sheep.

The costume of the Saxon ladies seems to have varied but little, excepting in length, from that worn by the men. The gunna, or gown, which was worn over the skirt or kirtle, was of the same form as the tunic already described; it was a little shorter than the kirtle, which reached to the feet—the latter being covered by shoes similar to those already mentioned. The women, however, wore a head-dress, formed of linen or silk, which looks not unlike the hood of comparatively modern times. It was called the head-rail, and besides forming a covering for the head, was made to enfold the neck and shoulders, not unlike the gorget which we see in ancient armour, in appearance; but formed by throwing fold over fold—making the face appear as if it looked out from a close-fitting helmet or gorget. Nor were the Saxon ladies at all deficient in ornaments. They had their cuffs and ribbons, necklaces and bracelets, ear-rings and brooches, set with gems—were quite adepts at twisting and curling the hair; and, as it is the historian's duty to tell the whole truth, we are compelled to confess, that at this early period they were also guilty of painting their cheeks, so that England has long had its rouged, as well as its rosy daughters. We read also of pale tunics, of dun-coloured garments, of white kirtles—and, in the Anglo-Saxon illustrations, we see robes of purple bordered with yellow, of green striped with red, of lilac interlaced with green, crimson striped with purple, all showing that a love of rich and pleasing colours was, above a thousand years ago, common to the ladies of England. Gloves appear to have been rarely worn. The sleeve of the tunic was made long enough to be drawn over the hand in cold weather; where the glove is represented, the thumb only is separate, the remainder of the fingers are covered, without

any division, like the mits, or mittens, worn by children at the present day. The military costume we have already described: nor does it appear to have undergone any alteration until after the Norman Conquest. They wore helmets, had wooden shields covered with leather, rimmed, and bossed with iron, had a kind of ringed armour to defend the breast, and such weapons as we have frequently made mention of in our descriptions of the battles.

Turning to their furniture, we find, that besides benches and stools, they had also seats with backs to them, not unlike the chairs or sofas of the present day. Many of these are richly ornamented with the forms of lions, eagles, and dragons; and no better proof need be advanced than this profusion of carved work, to show, that in their domestic comforts they had stepped far beyond the mere wants and common necessities of life, and made considerable progress in its refinements and luxuries. Their chairs and tables were not only formed of wood richly carved, but sometimes inlaid with gold, silver, and ivory. Nor were the eating and drinking vessels of the nobles less costly. Mention is made of gold and silver cups, on which figures of men and animals were engraven; and the weight of some of these was from two to four pounds. They covered their tables with cloths; had knives, spoons, drinking-horns, bowls, dishes, but in no instance do we meet with a fork. The roast meat or fowl appears to have been served on long spits; each guest cut off what he approved of, and then the attendant passed on to the next, who also helped himself—the bread and salt standing ready for all upon the table. The Saxons were hard drinkers—mead, wine, and ale flowed freely at their feasts; and it seems to have been a common custom for the guests to have slept in the apartment where the feast was held; for we read of the tables being removed, of bolsters being brought into the hall, and the company throwing themselves upon the floor, their only covering being their cloaks or skins, while their weapons were suspended from the boarded walls over their heads. Bedsteads were, however, in use, though they appear to have been low; the part where the head rested was raised like the end of a modern couch; beds, pillows, bed-clothes, curtains, sheets, and coverlets of linen and skins, are occasionally mentioned in the old Saxon wills, where we also find both the words sacking and bolster. The bed-pillows appear occasionally to have been made of plaited straw; and in one place we find mention of bed-curtains

formed of gilded fly-net, but what this may have been we are ignorant of. We read also of candlesticks, hand-bells, and mirrors, being made of silver. Glass appears to have been used more sparingly, though it is mentioned by Bede as being "used for lamps and vessels of many uses." The use of the bath is also frequently named; and we find them using frankincense, pepper, and cinnamon, and other spices.

England, at this period, abounded in woods, and the chief meat of the Saxons appears to have been the flesh of swine. Swine are frequently mentioned in wills. They were given in dowries, bequeathed to abbeys and monasteries, together with the land on which the swine fed. Oxen and sheep they used more sparingly; and it is very probable that they were not at this period so plentiful as swine. Deer, goats, and hares, and several varieties of fowl, were also used for food. Of fish, the eel appears to have been the most abundant. Eels were often received in payment of rent; estates were held by no other form than that of presenting so many eels annually; and eel-dykes are mentioned as forming the boundary lines of different possessions. Herrings, salmon, sturgeons, flounders, plaice, crabs, lobsters, oysters, muscles, cockles, winkles, and even the porpoise, is named amongst the fish which they consumed. Cheese, milk, butter, and eggs, were among the common articles of the food of the Saxons. They used also both wheat and barley bread, and had wind and water mills to grind their corn. They appear to have been great consumers of honey; and amongst their vegetables, beans and colewort are frequently mentioned. In their soups they used herbs; and amongst their fruits we find pears, apples, grapes, nuts, and even almonds and figs were grown in the orchards which belonged to the monasteries. Salt was extensively used; and they seem to have slaughtered numbers of their cattle in autumn, which they cured and salted for winter consumption; and from this we might infer that there was a scarcity of fodder during the winter months. They boiled, baked, and roasted their victuals as we do now. Mention is made of their ovens and boiling vessels, and of their fish having been broiled. To eat or drink what a cat or dog had spoiled, they were compelled afterwards to undergo a penance; also, if any one gave to another any liquor in which a mouse or a weazel had been found dead, four days' penance was inflicted; or if a monk, he was doomed to sing three hundred psalms.

There seem to have been ale-houses or taverns at a very early period; and we find a priest forbidden to either eat or drink in those places where ale was sold. So plentiful does animal food appear to have been, that a master was prohibited from giving it to his servants on fast-days; if he did, he was sentenced to the pillory.

Beginning with their in-door sports and pastimes, we find games similar to chess and backgammon amongst their social amusements, while gleemen, dancers, tumblers, and harpers, contributed to their merriment. In the early illuminations we see jugglers throwing up three knives and balls, and catching each alternately, just as the same feat is performed in the present day. The Saxons were also great lovers of the chase. Alfred, as we have shown, was a famous hunter; and Harold received his surname of Harefoot through his swiftness in following the chase. Boars and wild deer appear to have been their favourite game, and sometimes they hunted down "the grey wolf of the weald." Wolf-traps and wolf-pits are often mentioned in the Saxon records. England was not in those days cursed with game-laws. Every man might pursue the game upon his own land, and over hundreds of miles of wood and moor-hill, dale and common, without any one interfering with him. There was no exception made, only to the spot in which the king hunted, and this restriction appears only to have been limited to the time and place where he followed the chase. When the royal hunt was over, the forest was again free. The Saxons hunted with hawks and hounds; and Alfred the Great wrote instructions on the management of hawks. Nets, pits, bows and arrows, and slings, were also used for capturing and destroying game.

The women were protected by many excellent laws; and violence offered to them was visited by such severe pains and penalties as make us ashamed of the justice which the insulted female obtains in modern times when she seeks redress. The first step towards marriage consisted in obtaining the lady's consent, the second that of her parents or friends; the intended husband then pledged himself to maintain his wife in becoming dignity; his friends were bound for the fulfilment of his engagement. Next, provision was made for the children; and here, again, the husband had to find sureties. Then came the morgen-gift, or jointure, which was either money or land, paid or made over the day after the marriage. Provision was also made in case of the husband's death,

but if a widow married within twelve months of her widowhood she forfeited all claim to the property of her former husband. The marriage ceremony was solemnized by the presence of the priest, who having consecrated their union, prayed for the Divine blessing to settle upon them, and that they might live in holiness, happiness, and prosperity. Women had property in their own right, which they could dispose of without the husband's consent; they were also witnesses at the signing of deeds and charters. In the Saxon manuscripts we never meet with the figures of women engaged in out-of-door labour; this was always done by the men, although the wealthy classes had their slaves of both sexes. To women the household occupation seems solely to have belonged. Alfred the Great wrote the following beautiful description of the love of a wife for her husband:—"She lives now for thee, and thee only; hence she loves nothing else but thee. She has enough of every good in this present life, but she has despised it all for thee alone. She has shunned it all because she has not thee also. This one thing is now wanting to her; thine absence makes her think that all which she possesses is nothing. Hence, for thy love she is wasting; and full nigh dead with tears and sorrow." Who can doubt but that this passage describes his own feelings, when he wandered hungry and homeless about the wilds of Athelney, and thought of her he had left weeping in solitude behind? It is one of the many beautiful original passages which are found in his *Boethius*, for Alfred was no mere translator, but enriched his author from the storehouse of his own thoughts.

While pagans, the Saxons frequently burnt the bodies of their dead, but this custom they for ever abandoned after they became converts to Christianity. Their first mode of interment appears to have been a grave, in which they placed the body without any covering excepting the earth which was thrown over it. Sometimes the body was rolled in a sheet of lead; and at Swinehead's Abbey, in Lincolnshire, several skeletons have been dug up lately, wrapped round with the same material, but without any vestige of a coffin appearing; though this is no proof of wooden coffins not having been used at the period of interment, which through the lapse of long centuries may have decayed and mingled with the soil. Stone coffins were commonly used by the wealthy, and but few were at first allowed to be buried within walled towns. By degrees the churches began to be used as

places of sepulture, though only men distinguished for their piety and good works appear at first to have been buried in these ancient edifices. After a time, the churches and church-yards became crowded with graves, and then the bodies were removed to some distance for burial. The passing-bell was rung at a very early period; it is mentioned by Bede, and there is but little doubt that the custom dates from nearly the first introduction of Christianity. The clergy, on the death of a person, received a payment, called the "soul-scot," which at times amounted to an immense sum; even land was left by the dead, that prayers might be offered up for the welfare of the soul; and thus in early times the churches were enriched. The burial of Archbishop Wilfred, in the eighth century, is thus described by Eddius:—"Upon a certain day, many abbots and clergy met those who conducted the corpse of the holy bishop in a hearse, and begged that they might be permitted to wash the body, and dress it honourably, as befitted its dignity. This was granted; and an abbot named Baculus then spread his surplice on the ground, and the brethren depositing the body upon it, washed it with their own hands, then, dressing it in the ecclesiastical habit, they carried it along, singing psalms and hymns as they proceeded. When they approached the monastery, the monks came out to meet it, and scarcely one refrained from shedding tears and weeping aloud. And thus it was borne, amid hymns and tears, to its final resting-place, the church which the good bishop had built and dedicated to St. Peter." The Saxons had also gilds or clubs, in which the artizans, or such as seem to have consisted of the middle classes, subscribed for the burial of a member, and a fine was inflicted upon every brother who did not attend the funeral. Thus, above a thousand years ago, were burial societies established in England—a clear proof of the respect which the Saxons paid to their dead.



INDEX.

ABBOT of Croyland, murdered by the Danes, 162
 Adils, a British Prince, slain, 207•
 Adrian, Emperor, northern barrier erected by, 40
 Aedd the Great, 2; landing of his son in Britain, 5, 7
 Ælfheag, Bishop, dissuades Dunstan from marriage, 221
 Agricola, comes over to govern Britain, 38; his mild sway, *ib.*; great improvements introduced by, 39; his conflicts with the Scotch, *ib.*; discovers Britain to be an island, *ib.*; government of, 52
 Alaric the Goth, defeat of his army, 44
 Alcuin, writings of, 349
 Aldhelm, a celebrated scholar, 120; his Latin writings, 348
 Alençon, town of, brutality of William of Normandy at, 285
 Alexander the Second, acknowledges the marriage of William of Normandy with Matilda, 294
 Alfheda, the daughter of Offa, 137; becomes a nun, 138; her death, 139
 Alfred, the son of King Oswy, 116; marries Cyneburga, daughter of Penda, 117; his accession to the throne, 120; his high acquirements, *ib.*; his court the resort of literary men, *ib.*
 Alfred, Prince, son of King Oswy, afterwards styled the Great, translation by, 108; education of, 152; assists his brother against the Danes, 158; fond of the chase, 159, 361; married to a Mercian lady, 159; his obligations to her, *ib.*; encounters the Danes in Berkshire, 168; ascends the

throne of Wessex, 169; his distinguished services, 170; state of his kingdom, *ib.*; his sad prospects, *ib.*; makes peace with his enemies, 171; defeats the Danish fleet, 173; abdicates his throne, *ib.*; his unhappy state, 174; charges made against, *ib.*; conjectures respecting, 175; his forlorn condition, 176; anecdote of, *ib.*; his perseverance under difficulties, 177; harasses the Danes, 178; his benevolence, 179; visits the Danish camp in disguise, 180; returns to his hiding-place at Athelney, *ib.*; his warm welcome, 181; defeats the Danes on the plains of Ethandune, 182; submission of Godrun to, *ib.*; his treaty with him, *ib.*; allots a territory to the Danish king, *ib.*; laws made by, *ib.*; improvements effected by, 184; increases his navy, *ib.*; circumvents Hastings, the Sea King, 186; compels him to sue for peace, 187; drives the Danes from Exeter, 188; his generosity to the family of Hastings, 188, 189; drains the River Lea, 191; his death, 192; character of him, 193; his early studies, *ib.*; his devotion to learning, 194; attacked by a lingering disease, 195; sends for literary men from abroad, *ib.*; translations made by, *ib.*; his consideration for his attendants, 196; division of his income, *ib.*; mode of employing his time, *ib.*; his curious method of computing it, *ib.*; sends an embassy to India, 197; administers justice, *ib.*; salutary laws made by, *ib.*;

- a great warrior, statesman, and scholar, 198; his exalted virtues, 199; succeeded by his son, Edward the Elder, *ib.*; confers the honour of knighthood on his grandson, Athelstan, 203; beautiful description given by, 362
- Alfred, the Saxon Prince, lands in England, 267; Earl Godwin swears fealty to him, *ib.*; takes up his quarters at Guildford, *ib.*; his cruel sufferings and death, 269
- Alfric, commands the Saxon fleet, 242; a traitor to his country, *ib.*; his barbarity to his son, *ib.*
- Algar, the Earl of, his valour, 161; repulses the Danes, 162; his warning voice, *ib.*; ravages of, 291; defeated by Harold, 292
- Alred, a descendant of Ida, 127
- Alstan, Bishop of Sherborne, his military spirit, 151; his great energy, *ib.*; alluded to, 153
- Ambition, kings wrecked on the rock of, 112
- Andredes Ceaster, dreadful battle at, 73; the inhabitants massacred, 74
- Andredswold, forest of, 126
- Aneurin, an ancient poet, 84; escape of, 86; describes the battle of Cattaeth, *ib.*
- Anglesey, Isle of, the Druids retire to, 34; massacre in, 38
- Anglo-Saxons, their religion, 339; their forms of worship, *ib.*; their religious houses, 340; their benevolence and charity, *ib.*; duties of their priests, 342; penances inflicted by, 343; government and laws of the, *ib.*; their punishment of murder, *ib.*; their mode of trial, 345; literature of the, 348; a highly intelligent race, 350; originality of their poetry, *ib.*; their homilies and grave works, 351; ballads of the, *ib.*; architecture, art, and science among the, 352; their early churches formed of wood, *ib.*; their houses, 354; their paintings and sculpture, *ib.*; musical instruments of the, 355; other branches of knowledge studied by the, 356; their dress, manners, customs, and every-day life, 357; lavish in their ornaments, 358; costume of their ladies, *ib.*; furniture of, 359; their diet, *ib.*; their sports and pastimes, 360; laws for protecting their women, 361. *See also* Saxons.
- Animal remains in Great Britain, 3
- Anlaf, escapes to Ireland, 204, 205; powerful confederacy formed by, against Athelstan, 205; sails with a large fleet from the Humber, 206; visits Athelstan's camp in disguise, *ib.*; his dispositions for battle, 207; defeated at Brunanburg, 209
- Anna, the successor of Ecgrie, 115; slain by Penda, *ib.*
- Ansiam, a swineherd, stabs Sigebyhrt, 126
- Architecture, art, and science, among the Saxons, 352
- Arlette, the fair maid of Falaise, 283
- Arthur, King, valour of, 77; his twelve battles, 78; portrait drawn of, *ib.*; his renowned deeds, 79; his death-wound, 80; belief respecting, *ib.*; fables relative to, *ib.*; his death kept secret, 81; discovery of his remains, *ib.*; description of his bones, 82; the remains of his wife, *ib.*; inscriptions relative to, *ib.*
- Artificers, foreign, encouraged in England, 232
- Askebert, the tutor of Kinelm, 141
- Asser, the friend of Alfred, 174; anecdote related by, 176; alluded to, 195
- Astrologer of Duke William, his death, 324
- Athelney, the hiding-place of King Alfred, 180
- Athelstan, the illegitimate son of Edward the Elder, appointed his successor, 202; elected to the crown, 203; his early years, *ib.*;

- his high attainments, *ib.*; marries his sister to Sigtryg, 203; adds Northumbria to his dominions, 204; powerful confederacy against him, 205; Anlaf visits his camp in disguise, 206; his great victory of Brunanburg over the combined forces, 209; his congratulations on the occasion, 210; his sisters sought in marriage, 211; friendship of European Sovereigns for, *ib.*; events during his reign, *ib.*; his liberality and generosity, 212; his barbarous sentence on his brother, Edwin, *ib.*; his remorse and death, *ib.*; succeeded by his brother, Edmund the Elder, *ib.*
- Athelwold, marries the beautiful Elfrida, 230; murdered, 231
- Athelwold, Bishop of Winchester, his death, 236
- Attila and his Goths, 49
- Augustin, his benevolent mission to Britain, 93; lands in the Isle of Thanet, 94; reply of King Ethelbert to, 95; administers the rites and ceremonies of the Christian religion, 96; title conferred on by the Pope, *ib.*; his death, 98
- Aurelius Ambrosius, the Roman party of, 48
- Axeholme, battle fought on the island of, 200
- BALDWIN, surnamed the Arm of Iron, his marriage with Judith, 154; becomes Earl of Flanders, *ib.*
- Ballads of the Saxons, 351; beautiful specimen of them, 352
- Bamborough castle, set on fire, 114
- Banner, the magical, taken by the Saxons, 178
- Banquet, a hideous one, 58
- Bardney, monastery of, destroyed, 161
- Bards, early British ones, 75; contrasted with the present, 90
- Battle Abbey, position of the Norman forces near, 327
- Battle of the Pleasant Valley, 85
- Bayeux, Bishop of, 330
- Bayeux, the Castle of, 298
- Beasts, wild, in Great Britain, 8
- Beaurain, fortress of, Harold a captive in, 297
- Bede, the historian, 108-110, 195; his Ecclesiastical History of England, 349; some account of his life and writings, *ib.*; his death, 358
- Beds, primitive, 9
- Benedict, excommunicated, 294
- Bensington, battle of, 133
- Beornwulf, defeated at Ellan, 141; slain in battle, 142
- Bernicia, a Saxon kingdom, 99; Edwin becomes king of, 104
- Bernred, rebellion under, 130
- Bertha, the fair consort of King Ethelbert, 94, 95; her death, 97
- Bertulph, defeated by the Danes, 152
- Bishop, reply of a, to the King's sons, 98
- Boadicea, Queen, oppressions of the Romans towards, 35; her heroic resolves, *ib.*; her terrible revenge, 36; her desolating forces, *ib.*; harangues her tribes, 37; defeated, and dies by her own hand, *ib.*; revolt of, alluded to, 53; golden girdle worn by, 54
- Boy, Saxon, his life preserved, 164; his escape from the Danes, 165; returns to Croyland, *ib.*
- Bretwalda, or King of Britain, 91
- Bridgenorth, entrenchment of the Danes at, 191
- Brihtric, jealousy of, 134; marries the daughter of Offa, 135; dies by poison, 138
- Brihtric, a Saxon nobleman, the estates of, 301; thrown into prison, *ib.*
- Britons, the ancient, 6; a wild and hardy race, 7; their habits and mode of life, *ib.*; their dress and personal appearance, *ib.*; attacked by the Romans, under Julius Cæsar, 18; defeated, 19; successes of, 23; sue for peace, *ib.*; offer no resistance on Cæsar's second invasion,

- 24 ; their desperate encounter with the Romans, 25-27 ; signal defeat of, 28 ; their mode of warfare, 29 ; dissensions among the, 29, 56 ; absence of records relative to the, 31 ; defeated in Wales under Caractacus, 33—and also under Queen Boadicea, 37 ; make rapid strides in civilization, 39, 41, 42, 54 ; apply for help to Rome, 45 ; their critical position, 46 ; new spirit infused into the, 47 ; throw off the foreign yoke, 48 ; struggles of the, *ib.* ; altered dress of the, 54 ; mode of burying their dead, *ib.* ; little known of their funeral ceremonies, 56 ; custom of painting or tattooing their skins abolished, *ib.* ; their fearful conflicts with the Saxons, 68 ; their war with the Visigoths, 71 ; victorious at the Battle of the Pleasant Valley, 85 ; their conflict with the Angles, 86 ; their love of warfare, 113 ; laws established amongst the, 121
- Brunanburg, great victory of, 209 ; Anglo-Saxon song on that event, *ib.*
- Brythnoth, governor of Essex, 240 ; his intrepidity, 241 ; slain, *ib.*
- Brythonod, Abbot, assassinated, 238
- Bulls, white, used by the Druids, 15
- Burford, dreadful battle near, 124
- Burial-societies among the Saxons, 363
- Burrhed, king of Mercia, 158 ; vacates his throne, and goes to Rome, 171 ; the Danes give the crown to Ceolwulf, *ib.* ; brief reign of, 172
- Buttington fortress, the Danes blockaded in, 189, 190
- CADVAN, a British king, 99 ; flight of, 109 ; defeats King Edwin, *ib.*
- Cadwaladyr, the last of the Cymry, 119
- Cadwallon, his numerous battles and skirmishes, 110 ; ravages of, *ib.* ; solemn prayer of, 111 ; defeated and slain, *ib.* ; alluded to, 112, 113
- Cadwine, a judge, hanged, 197
- Caledonians, their resistance to the Romans, 39 ; defeat the latter, 41
- Calne, a third council held at, 234
- Camaladonum, Roman colony of, destroyed by the Britons, 36
- Camlan, battle of, 80
- Canute, the son of Swein, chosen king of England, 248 ; his struggles with the Saxons, *ib.* ; lays siege to London, 250 ; wounded, 251 ; retreat of, 252 ; his ravages in Mercia, *ib.* ; treaty of Edmund Ironside with, 254 ; becomes king of all England, *ib.* ; his coronation, 255 ; his treaty with the Saxon nobles, *ib.* ; banishes the relations of Ethelred and the children of Edmund, *ib.* ; his alliance with Emma, dowager-queen of the Saxons, 256 ; visits Denmark, 257 ; invades Norway, 258 ; erects a monument to Ælfeg, archbishop of Canterbury, 259 ; carries off the dead body, *ib.* ; kills one of his soldiers, 260 ; his penance, *ib.* ; establishes the tax of Peter's pence, 261 ; picture of him rebuking his courtiers, 262 ; his vanity and theatrical display, *ib.* ; his pilgrimage to Rome, 263 ; letter of, *ib.* ; his death, 264 ; illegitimate sons of, 265
- Caracalla, the successor of Severus, 42
- Caractacus, the renowned commander of the Britons, 31 ; harangues his army, 33 ; betrayed and carried captive to Rome, *ib.* ; uncertainty as to his fate, *ib.*
- Carausius, a bold naval commander, 43 ; assassinated, *ib.*
- Cassiteredes, or the Islands of Tin, the ancient name of Great Britain, 6
- Cassivellaunus, heads the Britons against the Romans, 27 ; defeated, *ib.* ; retreat of, 28 ; betrayed, 29 ; his capital attacked, *ib.* ; sues for peace, 30
- Catigern, the son of Vortigern, slain in battle, 68

- Cattraeth, poem descriptive of the battle of, 86-90
- Ceadwalla, slays the King of Sussex, 121; his ravages in Kent, *ib.*; revenges his brother's death, *ib.*; dies at Rome, *ib.*
- Cealwin, the Saxon chief, British king slain by, 76
- Ceawlin, defeats Ethelbert, 92
- Celibacy, unnatural laws of, 231
- Celts, inhabit Britain, 6; trade with the Greeks and Romans, *ib.*; war-weapons of the, 10; their simple manners, *ib.*; their costume, *ib.*; their war-chariots, 11; fearless conduct of their warriors, *ib.*; language of the, 57
- Cenwalch, driven out of his kingdom by Penda, 114; again exiled, 118; his death, *ib.*; his widow, Saxburga, succeeds to the throne, 118
- Ceolred, king of Mercia, 122
- Ceolwulf, king of Northumbria, 121; resigns his crown, 127
- Cerdic the Saxon, his landing in Britain, 75; his battles with the islanders, *ib.*; defeat of his army, 76; great victory achieved by, *ib.*; his death, 79
- Charibert, king of the Franks, his daughter married to Ethelbert, 94; her influence over him, 95
- Charlemagne, king, 130; his presents to Offa, 134; reply of, 139
- Chiefs, British, their domestic habits, 9
- Chieftain, ancient, grave of, described, 55
- Chinese, antiquity of the, 5
- Chippenham, attacked by the Danes, 173; battle of, 175
- Christianity, progress of, in Great Britain, 51, 339
- Churches of the Saxons, 352
- Cimmerii, the barbarous and warlike inhabitants of Britain, 6
- Cissa, king of Sussex, 92
- Claudian, his mention of the ancient Britons, 8
- Claudius, the Roman emperor, Carac-tacus taken captive before, 33
- Coifi, his reply to King Edwin, 107; profanes the temple, 108
- Columbanus, his learning, 348
- Comet, appearance of a large one, 303; supposed to portend evil, *ib.*
- Comius, sent on a mission by Julius Cæsar, 18; liberation of, 21
- Commodus, reign of, 40
- Conan, king of Brittany, his message to William of Normandy, 320; poisoned, 321
- Constantine the Great, 43; passes over to Gaul, 45; ambition of, *ib.*
- Constantine, seeks protection from the King of the Scots, 204; forms a league with Anlaf, 205; his escape at the battle of Brunanburg, 208
- Cornwall, huge stone in, 53
- Costume of the Saxons, 357
- Courtiers, rebuked by Canute, 262
- Crayford, great battle between the Saxons and Britons at, 7
- Crime, made to administer to the wants of the poor, 343
- Crodus, or Saxon idol, described, 62
- Croyland, Abbot of, 162; command given by him, 163
- Croyland, island of, assigned to the monks, 124
- Croyland, monastery of, 138, 139; the inmates massacred by the Danes, *ib.*
- Cumbra, a noble, fate of, 126; his death revenged, *ib.*
- Cuthred, king of Wessex, his jealousy of the King of Mercia, 124; his fearful battle with that monarch, 125; is victorious, 126; his death, *ib.*
- Cwichhelm, the pagan king of Wessex, treachery of, 105
- Cymri, the ancient inhabitants of Britain, 6; legions of the, 83; enter into a league with the Danes, 144
- Cyneburga, daughter of Penda, married to Alfred, the son of Oswy, 117
- Cyneheard, escape of, 134; secretes himself in a wood, 135; slain, *ib.*

Cynewulf, king of Wessex, defeated, 133; slain, 135

Cynric, the Saxon chief, 76

DANES, or ancient sea-kings, land in England, 143; ravages of the, *ib.*; their great fleet, *ib.*; council in London relative to, *ib.*; welcomed by the Cymry, 144; signally defeated in Cornwall, *ib.*; descent of the, 146; worship Odin, *ib.*; dominions of the, *ib.*; their habits and manners, 147; educated as pirates, *ib.*; their fearless character, *ib.*; their desperate excitement, 148; some account of their ships, *ib.*; mode of warfare among the, 149; their festive moments, *ib.*; reckless of danger, 150; their first settlement in Northumbria, 151; their daring incursions, *ib.*; immense fleet of the, enter the Thames, 152; dreadful ravages of the, *ib.*; signal defeats sustained by the, *ib.*; despatch another fleet to Britain, 156; march to York, devastating the island, 157; defeat the Northumbrians, *ib.*; their dreadful revenge, *ib.*; fortify themselves at Nottingham, 158; their treaty with the Saxons, *ib.*; carry death and desolation through the land, 160; atrocities of the, 161; defeated by the Saxons, *ib.*; burial of their dead, *ib.*; again repulsed, 162; artful device of, *ib.*; totally defeat the Saxons, *ib.*; their outrages at Croyland monastery, 163; break open the tombs, 164; attack the abbey of Peterborough, and put the monks to death, *ib.*; ravage East Anglia, 167; proceed towards Wessex, *ib.*; totally defeated in Berkshire, 168; proceedings of the, 171; attack Wessex, 172; violate their oaths, *ib.*; great naval victory over the, 173; attack Chippenham, *ib.*; defeated by King Alfred, 186-188; again driven from Exeter, 189; their fleet burnt, 191; their victory at Axeholme,

200; totally routed at Wodensfield, 201; flight of the, 202; their renewed invasions, 240; defeat the Saxons, 241; dreadful massacre of the, throughout England, 242; their ravages in England, 245

Dead, Roman mode of interring the, 54—burning the, 55

Deiri, a Saxon kingdom, 99, Edwin becomes king of, 104

Denulf, the cowherd, 177

De Wendover, Roger, statement of, 69; his animated description of the battle near Burford, 125

Diet of the Saxons, 359, 360

Diseases, supposed to be cured by charms, 356

Dive, the Norman fleet reach the mouth of the, 321

Dover, arrival of Julius Cæsar at, with his fleet, 18; description of the battle near, 20; serious *fracas* at, 279

Dream of Edwin, the son of King Ella, 101; observations on it, 102; remarkable ones, 310

Dress of the Saxons, 357

Drida, romantic incident relative to, 130; married to the King of Mercia, 131; her fiendish nature, *ib.*; incites Offa to the murder of his guest, 136; proves another Lady Macbeth, 137; causes the murder of Ethelbert, *ib.*; banished to a solitary fortress, 138; fate of, *ib.*

Druids, the ancient, despotic power of the 7, 8; their religious rites and ceremonies, 12; their personal appearance, *ib.*; treasures amassed by them, 13; their awful decrees, *ib.*; worship of the, 14; their incantations, *ib.*; temples of the, *ib.*; their symbols of office, *ib.*; their reverence for the mistletoe, 14; impostures of the, 15; mysteries of the, 16; vengeance on the, *ib.*; retire to the Island of Anglesey, 34; fall a sacrifice to the Romans, 35

Dunmail, inhuman cruelty towards his sons, 214

Dunstan, notoriety of, 218; various opinions as to his character, *ib.*; sketch of his life, 219; his early years, *ib.*; becomes delirious, 220; his high acquirements, *ib.*; driven from court, *ib.*; falls in love, 221; dissuaded from marriage, *ib.*; again attacked by sickness, *ib.*; recovers, and becomes a monk, *ib.*; lives in a narrow cell, 222; vulgar rumour respecting, *ib.*; his high connexions, *ib.*; sketch of his character, 223; assaults King Edwin on the day of his coronation, 225; again banished from court, *ib.*; remarks on his conduct, *ib.*; recalled, and new honours heaped upon him, 226; becomes Bishop of London, 228; created Archbishop of Canterbury, *ib.*; appoints his own friends as councillors to the young king, *ib.*; encourages the fine arts, *ib.*; establishes the Benedictine rules in the monasteries, *ib.*; advocates the cause of Edward the Martyr, 234; opposed by the dowager-queen Elfrida, *ib.*; frustrates her attempts, *ib.*; his pretended miracle, *ib.*; threat of, *ib.*; strange catastrophe said to have been brought about by him, 235; fate of his enemies, *ib.*; analysis of his character, 236

EADBALD, King of Kent, 98; marries his stepmother, *ib.*; turns pagan, *ib.*; his repentance, 99; becomes a Christian, 105; just argument of, *ib.*

Eadbert, reign of, 127

Eadmar, event recorded by, 235

Eadwulf, expulsion of, 121

Ealswitha, a Mercian lady, married to Prince Alfred 159; his obligations to her, *ib.*

Eanfrid, the son of Ethelfrith, reigns over Bernicia, 110; put to death, *ib.*

Eanred, his submission to Egbert, 142

Eardulf stabbed, 127; is cured, and placed upon the throne, 128; revolt of his subjects, 129

East Anglia, ravages of the Danes in, 167

Ecgfrid, son of Oswy, becomes king of Northumbria, 118; falls in battle, 119, 120

Ecgric, slain, 115; succeeded by Anna, *ib.*

Edburga, the daughter of Offa, dark deeds of, 131-138; poisons her husband, *ib.*; her offer rejected by Charlemagne, 139; her fate, *ib.*

Edeldun the rebel, 125; his valour and intrepidity, *ib.*

Edelwold, fate of, 127

Edgar succeeds Edwin as King of England, 227; his councillors appointed by Dunstan, 228; his address to the primate as to reformation in monasteries, 229; carries off a young lady from a nunnery, *ib.*; penalty imposed upon, 230; his visit to the beautiful Elfrida, daughter of the Earl of Devonshire, *ib.*; marries her on her husband's murder, 231; his personal courage, *ib.*; his love of pomp and display, *ib.*; his generosity, *ib.*; encourages foreign artificers, 232; his tribute of wolves' heads, *ib.*; his death, *ib.*; panegyric on his character, 233; improvements effected by, *ib.*; succeeded by Edward the Martyr, *ib.*

Edilburga, daughter of King Ethelbert, married to the King of the Deiri, 105; her love for him, *ib.*; gives birth to a daughter, 106; escapes with her children into Kent, 110; alluded to, 112, 113

Edith the Swan-necked, discovers the body of Harold, 338

Editha, daughter of Earl Godwin, her alliance with Edward the Confessor, 273; her beauty and accomplishments, *ib.*; deprived of her possessions, and shut up in a nunnery, 281; quits her convent, 289

Edmund, surnamed the Elder, ascends the Saxon throne, 213; his treaty with Anlaf, *ib.*; policy of,

- ib.*; conquests of, 214; dishonourable concession made by, *ib.*; his inhuman cruelty towards the sons of Dunmail, *ib.*; assassinated, *ib.*; succeeded by Edred, 215
- Edmund, surnamed Ironside, his courageous character, 250; gallantly defends London, *ib.*; his valour at the battle of Searston, 251; his victory over the Danes, 252; his treaty with Canute, 254; division of his kingdom, *ib.*; suspicious circumstances attending his death, *ib.*; his children committed to the care of the King of Hungary, 255
- Edred, succeeds his brother Edmund on the Saxon throne, 215; his dominions invaded by Eric, 216; gains a victory over him, 217; precautions taken by, *ib.*; his death, 218; succeeded by Edwin, son of Edmund the Elder, *ib.*
- Edric the Traitor, 252; put to death, 257
- Edwald, King of Kent, his reception of his sister, Queen Edilburga, 110
- Edward the Elder, son of King Alfred, elected king of Wessex, 199; his claim disputed by his cousin, Ethelwold, *ib.*; gives him battle, 200; defeats the Danes at Wodensfield, 201; his line of fortresses, *ib.*; their commanding position, *ib.*; his varied encounters with the Northmen, 202; his death, *ib.*; appoints Athelstan as his successor, *ib.*
- Edward the Martyr ascends the Saxon throne, 233; opposed by the dowager-queen Elfrida, 234; his cause advocated by Dunstan, *ib.*; visits his mother-in-law, 237; treacherously stabbed, *ib.*; sad fate of, *ib.*; succeeded by Ethelred, 238
- Edward the Confessor, seated on the throne of England by the influence of Earl Godwin, 273; marries Editha, the Earl's daughter, *ib.*; jealousy of his Norman favourites, *ib.*; his friendless state on arriving in England, *ib.*; visited by Eustace, count of Boulogne, 277; sufferings of his queen, 281; his imbecility, 291; suspects the designs of William of Normandy, 296; forewarning of, 302; his religious exercises, 303; his death, 304; interred in Westminster Abbey, *ib.*
- Edward, son of Edmund Ironside, his suspicious death, 295
- Edwin, son of King Ella, carried into Wales, 99; his romantic adventures, 100; claims the protection of King Redwald, 101; critical position of, *ib.*; dream of, *ib.*; becomes King of the Deira and Bernicia, 104; solemn promise of, 105; marries Edilburga, the daughter of Ethelbert, *ib.*; his love for his Christian queen, *ib.*; attempted assassination of, 106; preserved by a miracle, *ib.*; his campaign against the King of Wessex, *ib.*; whom he slays, *ib.*; dream of, 107; assembles his pagan priests and nobles, *ib.*; reply of Coifi to, *ib.*; speech of another orator to, 108; baptized in the Christian faith, 109; provides refreshment for travellers, *ib.*; his wars, *ib.*; defeated and slain, *ib.*; alluded to, 113
- Edwin, his accession to the Saxon throne, 219; his marriage with Elgiva, *ib.*; rudely attacked by Dunstan on the day of his coronation, 224; resents the insult by depriving him of office, 225; his queen cruelly tortured and savagely murdered by the command of Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, *ib.*; rebellion of his subjects, 226; his supposed murder, *ib.*; succeeded by Edgar, 227
- Egbert, Archbishop of York, his famous library, 349
- Egbert proceeds to France, 134; takes possession of the throne of Wessex, 140; his welcome reception, *ib.*; gains the battle of Ellan, 141; his victorious career, 142; intelligence brought to, 143; an-

- noyed by the incursions of the Danes, *ib.*; defeats the Danes in Cornwall, 144
- Egil, a sea-pirate, 206; valour of, 207
- Eglaf, returns to Norway, 258; put to death, *ib.*
- Eldred, Archbishop of York, refused the pallium, 293
- Elfeg, Archbishop of Canterbury, taken prisoner, 246; indignities offered to, *ib.*; murdered by the Danes, 247
- Elfric, his testimonial in praise of the character of Edgar, 233
- Elfrida, daughter of the Earl of Devonshire, her beauty reaches the king's ear, 230; Athelwold despatched to her father's castle, *ib.*; her marriage *ib.*; decorates her person to receive the king, *ib.*; her husband murdered, 231; married to Edgar, *ib.*; opposes Edward the Martyr in favour of her own son, 234-237; her views frustrated by Dunstan, *ib.*; visit of Edward to her, 237; causes him to be stabbed, *ib.*; commits another dark deed, 238; acknowledges her guilt, *ib.*; disappointment of, *ib.*; held in abhorrence, 239; seeks shelter in a nunnery, *ib.*; her son placed on the throne, *ib.*
- Elgiva, the sister of Athelstan, 210; her marriage with King Edwin, 219; insult offered to, 225; upbraids Odo for his insolence, *ib.*; savagely tortured and murdered by the archbishop's order, 225, 226
- Ella, the Saxon chieftain, lands in Great Britain, 73; his conflicts with the Britons, *ib.*; his death, 99; his son carried into Wales, *ib.*
- Ella, a Saxon king, takes Ragnar-Lodbrog prisoner, 155; cruelly put to death, 157
- Emma, the dowager-queen of Ethelred, married to Canute, 256; urges her sons to return to England, 267; seizure of her possessions, 275
- England, infested by wolves, 232; civil dissensions in, 239; dreadful massacre throughout, 244; ravages of the Danes in, 245-249; invaded by the Normans, 315. *See* Great Britain.
- Eric, King of Norway, dethroned, 212
- Eric, son of Harold of Norway, 215; his piratical adventures, *ib.*; his reckless life, 216; ravages England, *ib.*; slain in battle, 217; Scandinavian war-song on his death, *ib.*
- Erkenwin, the Saxon, his arrival in Great Britain, 83
- Ethelbald, becomes King of Mercia, 123; his friendship for the warrior, Guthlac, 124; gives Croyland to the monks, *ib.*; conquers Northumbria, *ib.*; rebellions said to have been fomented by, *ib.*; his terrific battle with Cuthred, 125; his defeat and flight, 126; slain, *ib.*; alluded to, 130
- Ethelbald, rebels against his father, 153; the crown left to, *ib.*; marries his father's young widow, Judith, *ib.*; brief career of, *ib.*
- Ethelbert, the young King of Kent, 91; disputes the claim of Ceawlin, *ib.*; defeated, 92; his courage and perseverance, *ib.*; marries the daughter of King Charibert, 94; her influence over him, 95; his answer to Augustin, *ib.*; baptized in the Christian faith, 96; his death, 97
- Ethelbert, king of East Anglia, 135; dark plot against him, 136; falls into the snare, 137; treacherously murdered, *ib.*
- Ethelbert, succeeds his brother, Ethelbald, 154
- Ethelfleda, her intrepidity, 201; watches over the education of Athelstan, 203
- Ethelfrith, the Northumbrian king, 99; takes possession of the Deiri, *ib.*; hated by the Cymry, 100; pursues Edwin, the son of Ella, *ib.*;

- his victorious career, 103 ; Redwald proceeds to attack him, *ib.* ; impetuous charge of, 104 ; slain, *ib.*
- Ethelred, his accession to the throne of Mercia, 119 ; resigns his crown, and enters a monastery, 123-127 ; invited to resume his throne, *ib.* ; his atrocities, *ib.* ; slain, *ib.*
- Ethelred, assists the King of Mercia against the Danes, 158 ; defeats the Danes in Berkshire, 168 ; his death, 169, 170
- Ethelred, styled the Unready, attempts to place him on the throne, 234-237 ; his grief on the death of his brother, 238 ; crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, 239 ; malediction at his coronation, *ib.* ; aversion of the Saxons to, *ib.* ; his dastardly conduct, 241 ; pays tribute, and makes peace with the Danes, *ib.* ; invasion of his dominions, 242 ; exhausts his exchequer to purchase peace, 243 ; imposes an oppressive tax upon the land, 247 ; betrayed by his commanders, *ib.* ; his subjects desert him, *ib.* ; flies to the Isle of Wight, and thence to Normandy, *ib.* ; recalled to England to resume the throne, 248 ; policy adopted by, *ib.* ; assisted in opposing the Danes by his illegitimate son, Edmund, *ib.*
- Ethelwold, cousin of Edward the Elder, lays claim to the crown, 199 ; sets up as sea-king, 200 ; musters a fleet, and ravages Mercia, *ib.* ; battle fought by, *ib.* ; his death, *ib.*
- Ethelwold, made bishop of Winchester, 228
- Ethelwulf, the father of Alfred the Great, 142 ; lethargy of, 151 ; his signal defeat of the Danes, 152 ; marries Judith, *ib.* ; his presents to the Pope, 153 ; revolt of his son, Ethelbald, *ib.* ; his death, *ib.* ; unnatural marriage of his young widow, *ib.*
- Eudes and Robert, brothers of William of Normandy, 317
- Eustace, count of Boulogne, visits the English court, 277 ; hospitably received by Edward, *ib.* ; his conduct at Dover, 278 ; his followers slain, *ib.* ; flies to London, *ib.* ; his representation to the king, *ib.* ; serious consequences likely to ensue on the occasion, 279
- Exeter, the Danes driven from, 188-189
- FENRIS, a huge wolf, 59
- Fitz-Ernest, Robert, slain, 335
- Fitz-Osbern, William, the seneschal, his exertions in favour of William of Normandy, 318
- Fitz-Richard, Gilbert, his honourable conduct, 320
- Flanders, Count of, brother-in-law of William of Normandy, 320
- Fleet, Norman, arrives at the mouth of the Dive, 321 ; in the roadsteads of St. Valery, *ib.* ; disasters to the, *ib.* ; crosses the Channel and reaches Pevensey Bay, 323 ; landing of the troops on board the, 324
- Fleet, Saxon, despatched to intercept that of the enemy, 326
- Folkland and Bocland, 347
- Ford-of-Eagles, battle of, death of Horsa at, 68
- Forest, a primeval English one, 73
- Forest-life in Great Britain, in former days, 8
- Fortresses, British, broken through by the Picts and Scots, 53 ; mode of constructing, *ib.* ; strong ones erected by Edward the Elder, 201 ; their commanding position, *ib.*
- Forts, first erected in Britain, 32, 39, 40
- Freberne, execution of, 197
- Fruit-trees, planted in Great Britain, 50-52
- Funeral ceremonies among the Saxons, 362
- Furniture of the Saxons, 359
- GALGACUS, a renowned Caledonian chief, 39

- Gaul, disaster of Julius Cæsar on the coast of, 21
- Geological formations, in Great Britain, 3
- Gerontius, a British chief, his perfidy, 45; his dreadful death, *ib.*
- Gildas, an early British historian, alluded to, 15, 42, 48, 77, 79, 82, 348
- Gimle, or Saxon heaven, 59
- Giraldus, statement respecting, 82
- Glastonbury Abbey, death of King Arthur in, 80; discovery of his remains in, 81
- God, his loving-kindness to mankind, 4; his great works, *ib.*
- Godifred, falls into the hands of Athelstan, 204; escapes, and sets up as pirate, *ib.*
- Godrun, a celebrated sea-king, 167; Alfred appears before, in disguise, 180; defeated, 182; his submission, 183; true to his allegiance, 190
- Godwin, the cowherd and the Danish chief, 253; becomes earl, 266; advocates the cause of Hardicanute, *ib.*; suspicion attaching to, 270; solemnly asserts his innocence in a court of justice, *ib.*; purchases the king's favour, 271; instrumental in placing Edward on the English throne, 273; his daughter married to that monarch, *ib.*; commanded by the king to attack Dover, 278; his refusal, 279; ordered to appear before the Council of Gloucester, *ib.*; popularity of his quarrel, *ib.*; armies raised by, *ib.*; summoned to appear before the council in London, 280; banished the kingdom, 281; his lands confiscated, *ib.*; the queen, his daughter, shut up in a nunnery, *ib.*; his proceedings while abroad, 286; joined by his sons, *ib.*; lands in England, 287; his enthusiastic reception, *ib.*; proffers his submission to the king, *ib.*; restored to his honours and estates, 289; curious circumstance attending his death, 290
- Golyddan, a Welsh bard, 69
- Gospel, propagation of the, 51; translated into the Saxon language, 342
- Government and laws of the Anglo-Saxons, 343
- Græcina and Claudia, piety of, 52
- Gratian, the Roman general, murdered, 45
- Great Britain, little known of its early inhabitants, 1; the ancient Cymri, 2; mixed language in, 3; geological formations in, *ib.*; animal remains in, *ib.*; religion of the natives of, 5; the Celts, 6; the Cassiteredes, the ancient name of the British isles, *ib.*; power of the Druids in, 7; primitive mode of life in, 8; wild animals in, *ib.*; domestic manners of the chiefs, 9; invaded by Plautius, 31; three different languages spoken in, 40; defenceless state of, 44-46; departure of the Romans from, 46-50; culture of the lands in, *ib.*; progress of Christianity in, 51; divided into five provinces, 53; fearful conflicts in, 68; landing of the Saxon chieftain, Ella, in, 73; succession of Saxon chiefs arrive in, 76. *See* England.
- Greeks and Romans, trade with the ancient Britons, 6
- Gregory, a monk, anecdote of, 92; his benevolent nature, *ib.*; becomes pontiff, 93; splendid manuscripts forwarded by, to Britain, 96; his penetration and discernment, 97; missionaries sent to England by, 352
- Guildford, Normans executed at, 269
- Gunhilda, the sister of Swein, slain, 244
- Gurth, Harold's brother, offer made to, 328; position of, 331; endeavours to persuade the king to quit the field, 330; slain, 336
- Guthlac the warrior, friendship of Ethelbald for, 124

- Guy, Count of Ponthieu, 297 ; seizes Harold and his followers, *ib.* ; demands ransom, *ib.* ; sends his captives to the fortress of Beaurain, *ib.*
- Haco, a Norwegian prince, sent to England to be educated, 211 ; becomes king of Norway, 212 ; finds a watery grave, 258
- Harald Hardrada, the Scandinavian sea-king, 307 ; his valour and daring, 308 ; quits Asia, and cruises along the coast of Sicily, *ib.* ; unites his forces to those of Tostig, 310 ; encounters King Harold, 312 ; slain, 313
- Hardicanute, the last of the sea-kings, 270 ; accession of, *ib.* ; disinters the body of Harold, *ib.* ; summons Earl Godwin to answer for the death of Alfred, *ib.* ; character of, 271 ; his "huscarles," *ib.* ; reckless conduct of, 272 ; invites Edward, the son of Ethelred, to England, *ib.* ; dies intoxicated at a marriage-feast in Lambeth, *ib.* ; succeeded by Edward the Confessor, *ib.*
- Harold, King of Norway, league with, 211 ; sends his son, Haco, to England, to be educated, *ib.*
- Harold Harefoot, the archbishop refuses to crown him, 266 ; crowns himself, and sets the church at defiance, *ib.* ; his death, 270
- Harold, the son of Earl Godwin, appointment given to, 291 ; popularity of, *ib.* ; makes war with Algar, 291 ; defeats him, 292 ; his respect to the king, 295 ; proceeds to Normandy, 296 ; shipwrecked on the French coast, 297 ; is made captive and carried to the fortress of Beaurain, *ib.* ; released by the intervention of William of Normandy, *ib.* ; his interview with the Duke, at Rouen, *ib.* ; affected kindness of the Norman Duke to, *ib.* ; the daughter of the latter offered in marriage to, 299 ; his oath on the relics of the saints, 300 ; returns to England, and acquaints the King with all that had passed, 302 ; elected King of England, 305 ; crowned, *ib.* ; a great favourite with his subjects, *ib.* ; restores the Saxon customs, 306 ; conduct of William the Norman on hearing of his accession, *ib.* ; the Duke of Normandy's message to, 309 ; marries the sister of Morkar of Northumbria, *ib.* ; his rapid march to the North, 311 ; prevents the surrender of York, 312 ; offers peace to his brother, 313 ; victory gained by, *ib.* ; accused of sacrilege at the court of Rome, 317 ; bill of excommunication obtained by Duke William against, *ib.* ; tidings carried to of the invasion of the Normans, 325 ; his rapid march from York to meet his enemies, *ib.* ; dispatches a fleet to intercept their flight, 326 ; disaffection among his troops, *ib.* ; arrives in London, *ib.* ; his hasty departure from the metropolis, *ib.* ; cause of his disasters, 327 ; his encampment described, *ib.* ; Duke William's message to, *ib.* ; occupation of his army the night before the battle, 329 ; advised by Gurth to quit the field, 330 ; inferiority of his forces to those of the enemy, *ib.* ; strong position taken up by, 331 ; valour of his soldiers, 332 ; successes obtained by, *ib.* ; dreadful slaughter of his forces, 335 ; slain, *ib.* ; both his brothers killed, 336 ; the remnant of his army pursued by the Normans, *ib.* ; his body discovered by Edith the Swan-necked, 338
- Harp, Saxon, described, 355
- Hastings, the sea-king, defeated by Alfred, 186 ; stratagem of, 187 ; compelled to sue for peace, *ib.* ; his family fall into the power of Alfred, 188 ; violates his oath, 189 ; fights his way from Chester, 190 ; builds a fortress on the River Lea, *ib.* ;

- entrenches himself at Bridgenorth, 191; retires to France, *ib.*
- Hastings, town of, march of the Norman army in the direction of, 324, 327; the battle of, described, 332; field of, the morning after the conflict, 337
- Hatfield Chase, Edwin defeated and slain at the battle of, 109, 113
- Heimdal, the brazen trumpet of, 59
- Hela the Terrible, 58, 59
- Hengist and Horsa, mission of, 56; land in Britain, 65; their interview with King Vortigern, *ib.*; defeat the Picts and Scots, 66; demands made by, 67; form a league with the Picts and Scots, 68; return with a large force to England, 69; dreadful massacre committed by, *ib.*
- Hengston Hill, defeat of the Danes at, 144
- Henry I., Emperor of Germany, 211
- Henry II., visits Wales, 81; directions given by, *ib.*
- Herdsmen, ancient, in Britain, 8
- Hexham, church at, described, 353
- Hieroglyphics of the Saxons, 63
- Holinshed, the historian, 305
- Honorius, the Roman Emperor, troops of, 45; appealed to, *ib.*
- Horsa, killed in battle, 68; his death said to have been revenged, 69
- Hrymer, the giant, 59
- Hubba, his savage intrepidity, 162; murders the Abbot of Croyland, 163; wounded, 164; slain, 178
- Huel, king of the Britons, 79
- Hunter, a primæval one, 2
- "Huscarles," or household troops, 271
- IDA and his twelve sons, their arrival in Britain, 84; designated "the flame-bearer," *ib.*; slain, 85
- Idel, River, near Retford, 103
- Idol-temple, profaned, 108
- Idols, worshipped by the ancient Britons, 5; those of the Saxons described, 61; offerings to the, *ib.*
- Ina, succeeds to the throne of Wessex, 121; laws established by, *ib.*; his war with Ceolred, 122; courage of his queen, *ib.*; astonishment of, *ib.*; reply of his consort to, *ib.*; resigns his crown, and goes on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he dies, 123
- Income, mode of appropriating, 196
- Ingulphus, the historian, 273
- Ingwar and Hubba, the sons of Ragnar, 156; their incursions in Britain, 157
- Inigils, brother of Ina, his death, 123
- Ireland, the round towers of, 5
- Isle of Thanet, supposition respecting, 49
- JEWELS, worn by the ladies, 54
- Judith, the daughter of Charles of France, married to Ethelwulf, 152; also to his son, 153; retires to a convent, *ib.*; her third wedding, 154; marriage of her son, *ib.*
- Judith, the step-mother of Alfred, teaches him to read, 193
- Julius Cæsar, his invasion of Britain, 6; his account of the religious rites and ceremonies of the Druids, 12; motives that actuated him, 17; arrives with his fleet off Dover, 18; lands his troops, 19; defeats the Britons, *ib.*; their offers of allegiance to him, 21; his disasters at sea, *ib.*; his conflict with the Britons, 22; defeated, 23; submission of the Britons to, *ib.*, his second invasion of Britain, 24; proceeds towards Canterbury, *ib.*; his desperate conflict with the Britons, 25-27; retreat of, 26; disasters to his fleet, *ib.*; his great victory and onward progress, 28; his troops harassed, 29; seeds of dissension sown by, *ib.*; his subjection of the Britons, 30; quits the island, *ib.*
- Justice, administration of, 197
- Justin and Gurthmund, Danish force under, 240; slain, 241

- Jutland, peninsula of, 50 ; now a portion of Denmark, 57
- KENNETH of Scotland, his apology to King Edgar, 231 ; generosity of the king to, *ib.*
- Kenwulf, King of Mercia, 140 ; demise of, 141 ; his children, *ib.* ; death of his son, *ib.*
- Kinelm, son of Kenwulf, treacherously murdered, 141
- Kings, ancient, fate of, 129
- Knowledge, laudable pursuit of, 194 ; state of, among the Saxons, 356
- LADIES, alteration in their style of dress, 54
- Ladies, Saxon, their costume described, 358
- Langfranc, Archbishop, 235 ; obtains a dispensation from the pontiff, 294
- Language, primitive, in Great Britain, 3
- Laws of the ancient Britons, 121 ; those established by King Alfred, 197
- Lea, River, drained by King Alfred, 191
- Leofric and Siward, influence of, 276
- Leverage, power of, 53
- Lilla, a faithful thane, assassinated, 106
- Lindisfarne, Cathedral of, 353
- Lindsey, ravages of the Danes in the district of, 160
- Literature of the Saxons, 348
- Llywarch, the British Bard, lament of, 85-90
- London, pillaged by barbarians, 43 ; becomes a celebrated city, 52, 83 ; contrasted with its present opulence and splendour, 81 ; gallantly defended by Edmund Ironside, 250 ; arrival of King Harold in, 326
- MAC CABE, his Catholic history of England, 88
- Magnus, King of Norway, 275 ; his death, 276
- Man, creation of, 4 ; his life on earth, 108
- Manuscripts, splendid, sent from Rome, 96
- Marcus, the Roman general, put to death, 435
- Marriage-ceremonies of the Saxons, 362
- Massacre, a cold-blooded one, 69
- Mastodon, or mammoth, gigantic remains of the, 4
- Matilda, daughter of Baldwin, Earl of Flanders, 301 ; singular mode of gaining her affections, *ib.* ; married to William of Normandy, *ib.* ; obtains the estates of Brihtric, *ib.* ; her horrible cruelty, 302
- Maximus, the Roman general, ambition of, 44 ; put to death, *ib.*
- May, called "Milk-month" by the Saxons, 63
- Medrawd, feud with, 79
- Mercia, establishment of the kingdom of, 87, 88 ; its rise and progress, 111
- Midnight marauders, 8
- Miracles, visions, and dreams, of the early ages, 102
- Mistletoe, held sacred by the Druids, 14
- Mollo, brother of the King of Wessex, fate of, 121
- Monasteries, reformation in the, 229
- Monks, contests between, and the secular clergy, 234 ; those of the Benedictine Order driven out of Mercia, *ib.*
- Monsters and giants, fables relative to, 1
- Morgan, a noble lady, 80
- Morkar, the great northern chieftain, opposes Tostig, 308-311 ; forces under, 326
- Mother of Earth, or Saxon goddess, 61 ; her sacred temple, *ib.*
- Mounds, immense, or ancient sepulchres, 55
- Murder, penalty for, 197 ; punishment of, by the Saxons, 343
- Music, on the power of, 355
- Musical instruments of the Saxons, 355

- NATANLEOD, the British King, slain, 75
- Nennius, the historian, 77, 79, 82; his early History of Britain, 348
- Neot, his rebuke of Alfred, 174
- Normandy, visit of Earl Harold to, 296; grand preparations in, for the invasion of England, 315; great assembly convoked in, 317; proclamation in, 319; vows of the knights of, 320
- Normans, jealousy of the Saxons towards the, 273-277; their growing power in England, 282; their hasty departure from London, 288; decree of banishment against, 289; their invasion of England, 324; march of their army towards Hastings, *ib.*; spread terror along the coast, 325; their forces drawn up near Battle Abbey, 327; arrival of the Saxons in face of, *ib.*; their occupation on the night before the battle, 329; their great victory over Harold, 335
- Northumbria, the kingdom of, divided, 110; first settlement of the Danes in, 151
- Norway, invaded by Canute, 258
- Norwich, destroyed by the Danes, 246
- OCTARCHY, Saxon, established, 87-91; its decline, 120
- Odilwald, favourable position of, 116
- Odin, the Saxons claim their descent from, 57; their belief respecting, 59; worship of, 108, 146-149
- Odo, a Dane, Archbishop of Canterbury, 219; Elgiva cruelly tortured and savagely murdered by, 225, 226; his death, 228
- Odun, Earl of Devonshire, slays Hubba, 178
- Offa, surnamed the Terrible, 119; his accession to the throne of Mercia, 130; married to Drida, a relation of Charlemagne, 131; deeds of his daughter, *ib.*; battles gained by, 133; his wars with the Welsh, *ib.*; huge rampart constructed by, *ib.*; presents of Charlemagne to, 134; incited by his wife to murder Ethelbert, 136
- Okely, or the Field of Oaks, battle at, 152
- Olaf, King of Norway, enters the Thames with a formidable fleet, 242; solemn promise given by, 243
- Omens and auguries, in days of yore, 60
- Ordeal, trial by, among the Saxons, 345
- Ordgar, Earl of Devonshire, 230
- Organ, Saxon, described, 355
- Orosius, translated by King Alfred, 195
- Osald, retires to a cloister, 127
- Osberga, mother of Alfred, her piety, 152
- Osberne, event recorded by, 235
- Osberte, defeated by the Danes, 157
- Osgod and Ailrik, Saxon monks, 338
- Osred, King of Northumbria, 121
- Osric, a descendant of Ella, ascends the throne of the Deiri, 110; slain, *ib.*
- Ostorius Scapula, his successes over the Britons, 32; ineffectual attempts of, 33; his death, 34
- Ostrida, wife of Ethelred, put to death, 123
- Osulf, King of Northumbria, slain, 127
- Oswald, piety of, 110; wrath of Penda towards, 111; attacked and slain by the King of Mercia, 113; pious ejaculation of, *ib.*; his charitable nature, 114
- Oswald, appointed to the bishopric of Worcester, 228
- Oswy, his treasures refused by Penda, 115; solemn vow of, 116; defeats and slays the Mercian king, *ib.*; subdues Mercia, 117; visit of the King of Essex to, 118; his death, *ib.*; succeeded by his son Ecgfrid, *ib.*
- Otho, surnamed the Great, 211
- Owen, the son of Urien, slain, 85
- PAINTING and sculpture among the Saxons, 354

- Pasture-lands, in Great Britain, 50
 Paulinus, continues to preach, 105
 Penda, a renowned pagan warrior, 109; sovereign of Mercia, 112; his military skill, *ib.*; his ambition and cruelty, *ib.*; slays Oswald, 113; barbarity of, 114; attacks the Castle of Bamborough, 114; makes war upon Cenwalch, *ib.*; defeats and slays Sigibert and Egrie, 115; also Anna, *ib.*; his bloodthirsty disposition, *ib.*; slain in a terrific battle against Oswy, 116; marriage of his son and daughter, 117.
 Penda, the son of Penda, married to Alchfleda, 117; assassinated, *ib.*
 Peterborough, monastery of, built, 119; butchery in the Abbey of, 164
 Peter's-pence, tax of, 261, 317
 Pevensey Bay, arrival of the Norman fleet in, 323; the forces disembark at, 324
 Philip of France, 320
 Phœnician voyagers, the early, 6
 Pict, the dying, 8
 Picts and Scots, their conflicts with the Romans, 39; ravages of the, 48-53; defeated by the Saxons, 66; form a league with Hengist and Horsa, 68
 Pierre de Vidal, a celebrated minstrel, 81
 Plautius, the Roman general, his invasion of Britain, 31; returns in triumph to Rome, *ib.*
 Poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, 350
 Provinces, Great Britain divided into five, 53; rulers appointed over, *ib.*
 Ptolemy, the days of, 50-57
 Punishments among the Saxons, 347
 RAGNAR-LODBROG, a famous sea-king, invades England, 154; destroys Paris, *ib.*; wreck of his ships, *ib.*; his conflict with Ella, 155; killed, *ib.*; his countrymen swear to avenge his death, and do so, 157
 Rainer, son of King Redwald, 103; slain in battle, 104
 Reading, taken by the Danes, 168
 Redwald, King of East Anglia, promises to protect Edwin, 101; engages to surrender his guest, *ib.*; his queen prevents him, 102; his high resolve, *ib.*; proceeds to attack Ethelfrith, 103; divides his forces, *ib.*; valour of, 104; his son embraces the Christian faith, 109; his death alluded to, 114
 Religion of the Anglo-Saxons, 349
 Repton, monastery of, destroyed, 171
 Rhuddlan, battle of, 133
 Richard, Prior, Hexham church described by, 353
 Riothamus, his war with the Visigoths, 89
 Roads, formation of, in Great Britain, 50
 Robert, Duke of Normandy, the father of William the Conqueror, 283; his pilgrimage to Rome, 284; his death, *ib.*
 Romans, invade Great Britain, 31; their departure, 46; dangers menacing the, 48; petition of the Britons to, 49; their introduction of civilization into Britain, 52
 Rome, the slave-market at, 92; pilgrimage of Canute to, 263
 Rouen, arrival of Harold at, 297
 Rowena, the Saxon princess, her surpassing beauty, 67; united to Vortigern, *ib.*; her influence over him, *ib.*; supposition respecting, 68; revenge said to have been taken by, 69; present at a bloody banquet, 70; her supposed dreadful fate, 71; reflections relative to, 72; discovery of her remains, 80
 ST. ALBAN, a British martyr, 51
 St. Neot, extract from the life of, 176
 St. Valery, arrival of the Norman fleet in the roadsteads of, 321; prayers of Duke William in the church of, 322
 Salisbury Plain, dreadful deed committed on, 70
 Sandwich, the Danes defeated at, 215
 Saxburga, Queen of Cenwalch, succeeds to the throne, 118

- Saxons, their invasion of Britain, 43; assist Vortigern, 48; history of the, by Sharon Turner, 50, 81, 176, 223, 236, 305, 336, 349, 355; decrease in their courage, 54; some account of the, 57; consist of three tribes, *ib.*; claim their descent from Odin, *ib.*; their weapons of war, 58; strange belief of the, 58, 59; superstitions of the, 60; their curious manners and customs, *ib.*; bravery of the, *ib.*; temple to their war-god, 61; their goddess called "the Mother of Earth," *ib.*; their personal appearance, 62; divided into four orders, 63; their computation of time, *ib.*; ignorant of the use of letters, *ib.*; character given of, by Zosimus, 64; wicker-boats of the, *ib.*; agree to assist the Britons, 65; repel the Picts and the Scots, 66; their conflict with the Britons, 68; defeated, and leave England, 69; return with a larger force to the island, *ib.*; dreadful massacres committed by, 69, 74; defeated at Crayford, 71; land in Britain under Cerdic, 75; signal defeat of, 76; arrival of another body of, under Erkenwin, 83; eight kingdoms established by, 87; wars among their own sovereigns, 91; defeat Hastings, the sea-king, 186; battle gained by, 189; powerful fleet of, 192; their great victory of Brunanburg, 209; routed by the Danes, 241; their jealousy of the Normans, 273-277; Harold, the last of their kings, slain at the battle of Hastings, 337; marriage ceremonies of the, 362; mode of interring their dead, *ib.*; burial societies among the, 363. *See also* Anglo-Saxons.
- Scandinavian pirates, 43
- Scandinavian war-song, 155
- Scearston, obstinate battle of, 251
- Scott, Sir Walter, on the departure of the Romans from Britain, 46
- Sea-kings, the ancient, their habits and manners, 146
- Seats, or three-legged stools, 9
- Seizin, ancient custom of taking, 324
- Selwood Forest, or the Wood of Willows, 181
- Sepulchres, ancient, described, 55
- Severus, Emperor, his ineffectual attempts to conquer the Caledonians, 41; his death, *ib.*
- Sherwood Forest, the Danish army passes through, 158
- Shields of the ancient Saxons, 58
- Ships, Danish, described, 148
- Sidroco, the sea-king, humanity of, 164; slain, 168
- Sigebert, king of Essex, his death, 98
- Sigebert, university founded by, 114; his ascetic life, *ib.*; heads the troops against Penda, 115; slain, *ib.*
- Sigebylrt, brief reign of, 126; flies, and conceals himself in a forest, *ib.*; is discovered, and stabbed to the heart, *ib.*
- Sigtryg, grandson of Ragnar-Lodbrog, marries the sister of Athelstan, 203; breaks his oath, 204; his death, *ib.*
- Silures, a brave British tribe, 32; defeat the Romans, 33
- Singin, rescues Turketul, 208
- Siward, the chief of Northumberland, 290
- Slave-boys, interesting, at Rome, 92; purchased by Gregory, a benevolent monk, 93; and sent back to England, 94
- Spenser, allusion to a beautiful stanza of, 62
- Sports and pastimes of the Saxons, 361
- Standard-bearer, Roman, a courageous one, 19
- Stigand, snatches up the pallium, 293; crowns Harold, 305
- Stonehenge, the ruins of, 2, 4, 17, 53, 70
- Strickland, Miss, her "Lives of the Queens of England," 302
- Stuf, the kinsman of Cerdic, 76
- Suetonius, retreats from London, 36; returns to Rome, 38

- Superstitions of the Saxons, 58-60 ;
 remains of, at the present day, 61
 Surtur, the black one, 59
 Swein, king of Denmark, 242 ; his
 renewed hostilities, 243 ; his sister
 put to death, 244 ; his ravages,
 245 ; acknowledged sovereign of
 England, 247 ; his death, 248 ; his
 son Canute appointed his successor
 by the Danes, *ib.*
 Sweyn, the son of Ulfr, aid solicited
 by, 275 ; obtains the Danish crown,
 276
- TACITUS, statement of, 32
 Tavistock, monastery of, destroyed,
 243
 Temple of the Saxons to their war-
 god, 61 ; punishment for robbing
 it, 62
 Thanet, the Isle of, appointed the
 residence of the Saxons, 66
 Theft and plunder, the early inhabi-
 tants of Great Britain addicted to, 8
 Theodore, Archbishop, 119
 Theodosius, spoils retaken by, 44
 Thierry's "Norman Conquest," al-
 luded to, 247, 295, 320, 336, 338
 Thorarin, the Danish poet, 262
 Thorolf, a sea-pirate, 206 ; command
 given to, 207 ; slain, *ib.*
 Time, computation of, among the
 Saxons, 63 ; singular mode of cal-
 culating, 196
 Toga, assumed by the Britons, 54
 Tostig, son of Earl Godwin, govern-
 ment given to, 291 ; unpopularity
 of, 292 ; his escape from York, *ib.* ;
 proceeds to Flanders, 293 ; pre-
 pares to make war with his brother,
 307 ; urges Duke William to assist
 him, *ib.* ; lands in the north of
 England, 308 ; compelled to retreat,
 309 ; joined by Harald Hardrada,
 310 ; noble reply of, 313 ; slain,
 314
 Toustain the Fair, 330
 Towers, the round, in Ireland, 5
 Traveller, wise provision for the, 109
- Trent, "the thirty-armed river,"
 115 ; valley of the, 158
 Trial, mode of, among the Saxons,
 345
 Turketul, the chancellor, command
 entrusted to, 207 ; his undaunted
 valour, 208 ; narrow escape of, *ib.* ;
 alluded to, 222, 225 ; picture drawn
 by, 246 ; appointed governor of
 East Anglia, 256, 257
 Turner, Sharon, his "History of the
 Anglo-Saxons," 50, 81, 176, 223,
 236, 305, 336, 349, 355
- ULPHUS, the horn of, 354
 Urbicas, northern boundary restored
 by, 40
 Urien, a British warrior, 84 ; ha-
 rangues his soldiers, 85 ; lament
 for, *ib.*
 Urns, ashes collected in, 55 ; elegant
 in form, *ib.*
- VALHALLA, halls of, Saxon belief re-
 specting the, 58, 59
 Valour and virtue, immortal, 194
 Veil, a beautiful golden one described,
 355
 Verulamium, fine city of, 52
 Visigoths, their war with the Britons,
 71, 89
 Vortigern, King, the Britons headed
 by, 48 ; character of, 49 ; claim of,
 56 ; his interview with Hengist
 and Horsa, 65 ; falls in love with
 and marries the Saxon princess,
 Rowena, 67 ; dreadful tragedy en-
 acted before, 69 ; supposed terrible
 fate of, 71
 Vortimer and Catigern, the two sons
 of Vortigern, oppose the Saxons,
 68 ; the former supposed to have
 killed Horsa, *ib.* ; thought to have
 been poisoned, 69
- WAR-CHARIOTS of the Celts, 11, 20
 Warrior, Celtic, bravery of, 11
 War-weapons of the Saxons, 58
 Wearmouth, monastery of, 349
 Welsh, feature in their character, 89 ;

- their wars with Offa the Terrible, 133; death of their king, 292; defeated, *ib.*
- Welsh Triads, rude fragments of the, 2, 5, 6
- Wessex, kingdom of, established, 77
- Wessex, king of, campaign of Edwin against, 106; slain, *ib.*
- Wicker-boats of the Saxons, 64
- Wife, her love for her husband, 362
- Wight, Isle of, subdued by the Romans, 32
- Wiglaf, flies to the monastery of Croyland, 142; permitted to occupy the throne of Mercia, *ib.*
- Wihtgar, the kinsman of Cerdric, 76
- Wihtred, king of Kent, ignorance of, 348
- Wilfred, Bishop, the instructor of King Alfred, 120; his improvements in ecclesiastical architecture, 353
- William, duke of Normandy, his visit to England, 283; his parentage, *ib.*; sketch of his father, surnamed Robert the Devil, *ib.*; his valour and daring, 284; inhuman act of, 285; kindly received by Edward, *ib.*; his departure for France, 286; the Pope acknowledges his marriage with Matilda, 294; demands the release of Harold and his followers, 297; ransoms them, *ib.*; his seeming kindness to Harold, *ib.*; his familiar conversation with his guest, 298; promises of, *ib.*; propositions of, 299; requires Harold to sign a bond, *ib.*; exacts a solemn oath from him, 300; his courtship of Matilda, daughter of the Earl of Flanders, 301; strange proofs of his affection, *ib.*; marries her, *ib.*; his grand preparations for the invasion of England, 315; description of his soldiers, 316; obtains the sanction of the Pope to seize the crown of England, and receives a consecrated banner from Rome, 317; pledge given him by the barons and citizens of Normandy, *ib.*; speech of William Fitz-Osbern on his behalf, 318; measures adopted by, 319; his promises to all who embarked in the expedition, *ib.*; vows of his knights, 320; threat of Conan, king of Brittany, to, 321; his fleet arrives at the mouth of the Dive, *ib.*; many of his vessels wrecked, *ib.*; precaution taken by, *ib.*; consternation among his troops, 322; his device to appease the murmurs of his soldiers, *ib.*; his own ship described, 323; his fleet crosses the Channel and arrives at Pevensey Bay, *ib.*; lands without opposition on the coast of Sussex, 324; death of his astrologer, *ib.*; his great presence of mind, *ib.*; marches towards Hastings, *ib.*; alarm of the inhabitants on his approach, 325; tidings of his arrival carried to Harold, *ib.*; his encampment described, 327; his message to Harold, *ib.*; occupation of his army the night before the battle, 329; his address to his soldiers, 331; advantages gained over him, 333; rumour relative to, *ib.*; re-animates his retreating forces, 334; stratagem adopted by, *ib.*; dreadful slaughter of his opponents, 335; captures the Saxon banner, 336; his great victory, *ib.*; pursues the Saxon troops, *ib.*
- William of Malmesbury, statements of, 134, 235
- Wimburn, town of, 199
- Winchester, synod at, 234
- Windreda, causes her brother to be put to death, 141; driven from the throne, *ib.*
- Winter, belief of a long one, 59
- Witena-gemot, or assembly of nobles, 198, 199, 203
- Woad, the herb, dye extracted from, 56
- Wodensfield, battle of, 201
- Wodin, the worshippers of, 77, 84, 91, 94, 95, 96; the god of battles, 103

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Wolves, annual tribute of the heads of, 232; Saxon names derived from, <i>ib.</i></p> <p>Women, Saxon laws for their protection, 361</p> <p>World, creation of the, 4</p> <p>Wulfhere, completes the monastery of Peterborough, 117; character of, 118; his death, 119</p> <p>Wulfnoth, a traitor and pirate, 247</p> <p>Wulfreda, a noble young lady, carried off from a nunnery by King Edgar, 229</p> | <p>Wulfstan, Archbishop, imprisoned, 217</p> <p>YORK, Harold arrives to the relief of, 311; march of the king from, 326</p> <p>York Minster, particulars respecting, 353</p> <p>ZION, holy hymns of, 52</p> <p>Zosimus, narrative of, 48; his character of the Saxons, 64</p> |
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THE END.

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